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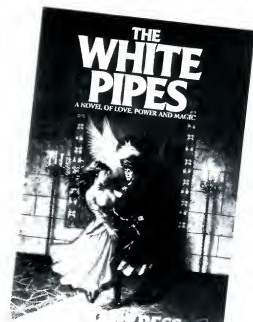
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# IMPULSE

editorial by Doug Fratz

Welcome to the "white issue" of THRUST - SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY REVIEW, otherwise known as the latest phase in our austerity program. Despite the lack of color on our cover, and the slight change in our title, I think you'll find the contents of this issue up to THRUST's usual high standards. The idea for a black and white cover actually came at the last minute, due to the nature of Mike Romesburg's cover art, which I felt would look best in black and white. The change also required a new cover layout, which lead to my changing the name of the magazine from THRUST - SCIENCE FICTION IN REVIEW to THRUST - SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY REVIEW.

So it goes . . .

**The Issue At Hand:** Our lead interview is a fascinating conversation between authors Al Sarrantonio and Parke Godwin. This may be the first interview I've ever published where the interviewer may be more familiar to THRUST's readers than the interviewee! Al Sarrantonio is a former editor at Doubleday who has become a full time author, primarily of dark fantasy and horror stories and, more recently, novels. His first novel, *The Worms*, was released by Doubleday (where else?) in January. Parke Godwin is probably best known as co-author with Marvin Kaye of the SF novels *The Masters of Solitude* and *Wintermind*, both of which have been reissued in paperback from Bantam, and for his short story collection, *The Fire When It Comes*, currently available in hardcover from Doubleday. His other SF novels include *Beloved Exile* and *Firelord*.

Columnist Michael Bishop is back this issue, with a few words about Nobel laureate William Golding, who may be the first Nobel winning novelist to have produced a large body of work which can, arguably, be seen as science fiction, (maybe speculative fiction is a better term), beginning with his first novel, *Lord of the Flies*. Of course, many in the science fiction field probably consider Golding's work more antiscience fiction than SF. Mike's piece on Golding, as he explains in his column, was actually originally written for OMNI. Look for Michael Bishop's latest novel, *Who Made Stevie Cry*, out in hardcover from Arkham House, and his upcoming essay collection (including many from THRUST), *Alien Graffiti*, to be issued by Mark Ziesing.

Our feature article this issue is by Janrae Frank on the feminist heroic fantasy of Phyllis Ann Karr. A story by Karr was at the heart of the controversy between DAW editor Donald Wolheim and anthologist Jessica Amanda Salmonson, which resulted in the demise of the highly successful *Amazon* anthology series from DAW. Janrae's look at Karr's fiction is both insightful and eminently reasonable.

This issue also features a profile of Philip Jose

Farmer by E. E. Gilpatrick. Among the interesting sidelights of this profile is the information that Farmer's newest novel, *Dayworld*, just released in hardcover from Putnam, has been optioned for a movie, and just may get produced. (One can't get too optimistic, however; I'm still waiting for the *I, Robot* movie to be released!) Our third interview this issue is with SF author, cartoonist, retired bureaucrat and Big Name Fan, Alexis Gilliland. Alexis is one of the field's true Renaissance men.

THRUST's newest columnist also returns this issue, as Darrell Schweitzer continues to look at science fiction in the movies. Darrell spends most of his time on **2010: Odyssey Two** and *Dune*, the major SF movies released in December, 1994 which asked the cinematic question, "How successful and how unsuccessful can movie adaptations of major SF novels be?" I'm not sure whether to consider myself fortunate or unfortunate to have been able to attend the gala World Premiere of *Dune* on December 3rd at the Kennedy Center here in Washington, D.C. It was a very impressive affair--the only movie premiere I have ever attended--except that I had to watch the movie without any advance warning regarding its quality, or lack thereof. Thank goodness I watched **2010** a short while thereafter, thereby re-establishing some faith in the ability of movie producers to produce good SF.

Of course, many of THRUST's "regular" columnists are once again absent. Charles Sheffield is in the middle of organizing the Fourth Annual Space Development Conference for this April in Washington, D.C.; other of my columnists must just be getting old and tired. Maybe I'll send them some Geritol . . .

Another thing you won't find in this issue is the 1994 Thrust Awards ballot. I've decided to suspend the Thrust Awards for now, but may bring them back, slightly changed, in future years. Maybe next issue, I'll tell you in my column, "The Alienated Critic," which SF I thought was most disappointing last year. (After all, why should I care if I alienate every author in the field?)

**The Thrusts Ahead:** I already have three excellent interviews for issue #23, to be published in September: Ben Bova, Jane Yolen, and Sharon Webb. And I have all summer to develop strong-arm tactics to get a few of my Contributing Editors to cough up some of their unpaid insights.

Format-wise, I am considering some bold changes in THRUST, possibly beginning next year. One possibility is to publish quarterly, 20-page issues. Any opinions?

And by the way, if you happen to be nominating for the Hugo Awards, consider nominating THRUST? Please?

See you all in September.

- Doug Fratz



# "Al and the Kid"

## a conversation with AL SARRANTONIO

by Parke Godwin

Al Sarrantonio was still assistant to Pat Lo Brutto at Doubleday when his short stories began to sell. In a few years, they were being picked up regularly by the yearly dark fantasy anthologies like *Shadows* and DAW's *The Year's Best Horror Stories*. Now, with three novels sold—*The Worms* and *Cambell Wood* to Doubleday and *Totentanz* to TOR—Al Sarrantonio is a young writer about to happen. To catch him on the upswing, I spent two days at his home in Putnam Valley, New York. We talked, walked the baby (Timothy) in his stroller, guzzled beer, listened to Brahms and Stravinsky, rapped on and off the record over both days until Al drove me to the train and Tim waved goodbye. Early on one day, Al described himself . . .

"I'm a mutt. Scots-Irish on my mother's side, Italian on my father's. His family came from the Abruzzi Mountains, north of Rome. I *think* north of Rome," he shrugs, opening two Tuborgs. "My grandmother used to tell stories to put a kid's hair on end. Wolves carrying away children, snakes going down a baby's throat. Mostly bullshit, I suppose," he allows, "but it makes a helluva story. Maybe that's where my feeling for horror comes from."

After the shape of Al's mustache and you have a stolid Groucho Marx with an habitual gait something like a worried bear on roller skates. At Doubleday, he was a genially efficient handler of publishing's lunacy, a perfect counter-balance to the moody, mercurial Lo Brutto, for whom his usual greeting was, "Hey, Turkey!" They got along well. Several years ago, Al decided to stay home and write full time. His wife Beth was away at work when I was there. Timothy, two years old, punctuated our interview and sometimes brought it to a dead stop. We told him to go play with the cobra . . .



**Godwin:** I want to talk about the short stories you've done in the last few years—"Under My Bed," "Boxes," "Pumpkinhead." Most or all of these stories deal with children as protagonists, and the comparison with Bradbury comes to mind. [Al winces.] Yeah, I know: here we go again. I know you admire Bradbury and in some cases write like him, at least with the same sensibility. I think childhood is a time of instinctive fear and literal interpretation that grownups tend to forget.

**Sarrantonio:** Grownups make the interpretations anyway, although they don't realize they're there. Kids, it's not all boggled up with Freudian hooey, it's black and white. Which is really what it should be all through life, but you start getting layers and layers . . . once you hit adolescence, the whole world seems to drop on your face all at once, and all that black and white turns to grays. I've heard stories about kids who saw water going down the toilet or bathtub who couldn't be potty-trained for a year and a half after that because they thought they were going to go down the drain with the water; they were terrified. I'm waiting for Tim to get into that stage. Right now he's just getting to the nightmare stage, starting to be afraid of things. The Incredible Hulk comes on—we just tracked this down last night. This normal guy, his skin bursts. The Hulk gets these fierce red, mean-looking eyes. Another cartoon, a guy turns into a wolf . . . we figured it out: it was the mean eyes. Tim was waking up in the middle of the night with nightmares. He's starting to be afraid of things. Frankenstein freaks him out now. I hesitate to say that television's to blame, but it's certainly a contributing factor. Tim goes around singing jingles from McDonald's commercials. He knows more about McDonalds than Humpty Dumpty.

**Godwin:** Was this the animus behind your choosing children as protagonists?



**Sarrantonio:** I think I was chosen by the children. Because I didn't notice until I'd built up a body of work that I was writing predominantly about children. A lot of these stories have horrible or unhappy endings. I finally figured it out: I'm reliving the bad childhood I never had. I had a very happy childhood, by and large. I'm reliving it in a way, bringing out all the black and white fears, but filtered through my Freudian sense, all the crap that covers it later on. . . . I attended the Clarion Workshop right out of college, 1974, and I was completely broke. My father came up with the money for it, after having coughed up for my college. He put up the money and I went there for six weeks. I came back and didn't touch the typewriter for two years, but I'll never forget what he did. I wouldn't have been able to go, otherwise. Clarion didn't teach me how to write, because no one can do that. What it did, though, was teach me how to teach myself. Clarion was a shortcut for me. Those two silent years were when I was teaching myself in my head, getting rid of all the junk, all the mistakes.

**Godwin:** My main problem as a student writer was never color or dialogue, but plot structure. What was yours?

**Sarrantonio:** The same thing, how to tell the story the right way, get from A to B to C, the end. Characterization was something I had to grow into. I remember Robin Scott Wilson telling me I'd have no trouble, but needed time. Being a writer is like being any other craftsman. Take a whittler, a man on a desert island with a stack of wood and a penknife. The first thing he turns out will be junk. But give him five years. At the end, he'll at least know how to whittle wood, and maybe he'll be a great whittler when his boat comes. The Clarion session really gave me a focus--and that two-year writer's block, because I got overloaded with information, along with the talent that was there. It wasn't counter-productive, though, because later I found out that what was going on was this chickensoup in my head that boiled real slowly for two years. I was learning to write subconsciously. The craft has to come in time. I don't know many people who are born with it; I don't know any. Those two years I stayed away from the typewriter, I was getting rid of a lot of junk that had nothing to do with craft. I started writing again and within another two years, I was selling steadily. And never looked back.

**Godwin:** What was your first published story?

**Sarrantonio:** In ISAAC ASIMOV'S, called "Ahead of the Joneses." It got anthologized--one of those short, letter-type stories. Cute, but I was just learning. Still am. I don't think you ever stop learning how to write--you better not or you're in trouble. I wouldn't trust a writer who said he'd stopped learning.

**Godwin:** Being Pat Lo Brutto's assistant at Doubleday must have been an invaluable experience, especially in an office as chaotic as Pat's. He told me once that he always hired assistants who were the exact opposite of him, because he knew they'd be organized.

**Sarrantonio:** You had to be. The greatest experience was learning the publishing business inside and out. There are a lot of pro's out there who don't know how it's done, or care. To find out what happens to a book from coming over the transom, how it gets read, who looks at it. People think editors are gods, but they're just people who have lousy days, good days, are receptive to some things, unresponsive to others. Damon Knight used to have a list of Nebula winners that he'd rejected for the Orbit series. I learned what publishing was all about and stopped fearing it.

**Godwin:** You read slush for Pat, didn't you?

**Sarrantonio:** [Laughs] Hey, Slush was a great novel! Yeah, I read a lot of slush. I started out as a three-in-one oil man at Doubleday, working for three different people. Sharon Jarvis was SF editor then. I was reading for her, mysteries, and working full time for Asimov's

editor, who was someone completely different. I was supposed to read half the day--didn't work out, did a hell of a lot of reading at home--and I learned how much junk there is out there. Whose dream is it? Sturgeon's Law? 99% of everything is crap.

**Godwin:** I think he said 85%.

**Sarrantonio:** That low? No, it's higher than that. Anyway, that's what I learned.

**Godwin:** Wouldn't it be great if the writers were improving as much as the cover art concepts? From your job at Doubleday, it was quite a courageous decision to quit, write full time and take care of the baby--"Mr. Mom," as you put it--while Beth kept her job. A lot of guys wouldn't have the balls to do that. Making a living can be a beautiful cop-out sometimes. "I have to make a living! Oh, but if I had the time. . . ." Which is bullshit. Either you do it or you don't. Still, there must have been a lot of doubts for you, as there were for me. You sit there in front of the typewriter, turn it on, and it hums insolently: "Okay, hambone, you bought the freedom package, now let's see what you can do." That's lonely, and all of us have to face it. Now you've got three books finished and ready to go. Tell me about **The Monks** from Doubleday. Didn't you say once that it's a good B-movie kind of book?

**Sarrantonio:** It's my John Carpenter movie. Someone gave me a bad horror book to read. **The Rats**, I think it was. I got about 40 pages into it, and all the author did was he'd set up a character and have him chewed up by the end of the chapter. Introduce a new character, get him chewed up. I said, "Jesus Christ, I can do this." I had an abortive attempt at a novel which later turned into my second book, but at first I was trying to be too fancy. So I sat down and said, okay, let's try for a straight line narrative. Action, shotguns, big monsters, and I had a good time doing it. That's all it is. I just tried to write a good B-movie story that everyone loved. So I said why not? I could get fancy later on. You know why King's stuff works? The bastard carries his own campfire around and he plunks it down in front of you when you open his book, and he starts telling you ghost stories in front of the campfire, and damned if it doesn't work. Every one of his books has a portable campfire in it.

**Godwin:** How about your second book, **Campbell Wood**?

**Sarrantonio:** Doubleday's doing that, too, a year after the first one. That'll be January 1986. The third book may be out from TOR in the middle somewhere, so I may have three books out almost within a year. With **Campbell**, I tried something different. Actually, Pete, I owe a little of this to you, because the book is about the last group of Faerie driven out of Scotland. . . . what did you call the Faerie family group, a faain? The faain's driven out, the queen is brought over on a ship as a stowaway, and they start a colony in New York. This takes place in the 1920's, and develops from there. [Laughs] It's another of those isolated community novels.

**Godwin:** Did Pat really like that one?

**Sarrantonio:** Yeah, he said the first book was a good story and the second was a really good novel, because there were things going on in it, not just straight line narrative, but real characterization.

**Godwin:** I'm looking forward to **Campbell**. Give me the poop on the third book, **Totentanz**.

**Sarrantonio:** I decided to spread my wings a little more. This is much longer, about 100,000 words or so. It's about death incarnate. . . . do you know Breughel's **The Triumph of Death**? Landscape, red skyline, people hanging off wagon wheels and being cut to pieces by skeletons. . . .

**Godwin:** Hey, I see it as a musical. How did you manage three books and the baby too?

**Sarrantonio:** The baby helped me, especially with **Campbell**

**Wood:** When we lived in the Bronx, there was this running track nearby. I'd take Tim out in his carriage and we'd go around and around. I worked all the problems out in my head doing it. Tim would trip out on the sky and the bird droppings. Being home fulltime is great. You feel like a lazy bum sometimes, but there are a lot of women who write while staying home with the kid; it's not hard, but it takes constant vigilance. Your mind is on that book 24 hours a day, and there's no way out. You wake up with it, little things go **ping!** "I did something wrong." Run back to the notepad, scratch it out, try to find where the reference was, no matter what. In the middle of watching a movie with Beth--**ping!** Something hits me like that. With the baby, it's a double vigilance, because you always have to keep an ear out for him too. It's like being schizophrenic, you're living two lives, on all the time. Neither of them appear very hard, but they're always there. You can be almost psychotic by the end of a book.

**Godwin:** Especially when you wake up and the first thought in your foggy brain is a ping--**that's** what I did wrong. I always admire organized writers. Most of my notes go in one cheapo notebook and a folder.

**Sarrantonio:** Mine are all scribbles all over 5x7 cards or just pieces of typing paper. I solved every problem on the last book in one night, sat down right here, stream of consciousness note-taking. At the end I had 12 double-sided pages of notes, but I knew what the book was about. I do the first draft straight through. As it gets later in the book and I feel something's wrong, I chuck it out right away. The real writing is second draft. I cut and paste, and by the end of the second draft, I've got thirty-eight different sizes of page all pasted together with different numbers on them, but that's the book.

**Godwin:** Bradbury would seem the most obvious influence on you, but I understand there were other, deeper ones.

**Sarrantonio:** I can't deny that, as a kid, I ate up everything Bradbury wrote, or that I tried to spit some of it back out, especially early on, but there are many other people whose writing I admired very much. Dylan Thomas is one. And there's a book by Laurie Lee called *Cider With Roses*--if Thomas had ever written an autobiography, it would have come out like this. Just beautiful writing. I don't think if you try to be poetic... it's just a style that develops. I just aspire to write well, and if it comes out like Bradbury, well, that's okay.

**Godwin:** Like Dylan Thomas, Bradbury had a tremendous yay-saying to life.

**Sarrantonio:** And a love of words.

**Godwin:** And not a glomy love at all. Along with that has got to come a love of life. You'd better love it. It's the only game in town, and you either play or you don't. You don't have to think about it; it's just there.

**Sarrantonio:** Maybe the writers who don't feel it spend most of their time bitching about the fact that they don't--no, we won't mention any names. They don't bitch vocally--most of them--but in their writing. I've read people who were obviously in love with words, but that doesn't do it all.

**Godwin:** Who were the people who most helped you get started?

**Sarrantonio:** Tom Disch, at Clarion ten years ago. He just said the right things at the right time. Sometimes people will say something that incubates and sprouts later. When I started to write professionally--SF that is, before I sort of drifted sideways into horror--Charlie Grant was a big influence. He rejected some of my early stuff, but he told me why, and then I started to click. Stu Schiff is another one. Stu's been very helpful, turned down a lot of things, but he does it the right way. No matter how old or big you get, you're

gonna get rejection slips. And of course, there was Pat Lo Brutto. I saw him work as an editor. He knows how to say the right thing in the right way.

**Godwin:** You said you were thirty-two. What do you see as future direction from here. Any intimations, loomings?

**Sarrantonio:** I just want to do more of the same and better. I've been trying to flex my muscles every time I do something new, and that's the way to move ahead. There's a lot of gold still to be mined in the dark fantasy field. A helluva lot of garbage, too. There's always been, but it's so **obvious** now. The same thing over and over.

**Godwin:** So the market bottoms out all the faster.

**Sarrantonio:** Which is bad, too, because you have less market. I think the horror short story is in trouble now because there is no market for it. Like, once TWILIGHT ZONE went bimonthly, it almost shut them off completely.

**Godwin:** There never was a huge market for horror short stories.

**Sarrantonio:** Never, but there's still an audience for them, certainly for better stuff than they're getting. I'd like to see a monthly magazine devoted to nothing else. Like maybe STEPHEN KING'S HORROR MAGAZINE, a monthly market for 10 or 12 stories.

**Godwin:** Sure, you could always fill it, but could you maintain high quality? An editor can only publish what he gets. He knows the top people and can send them desperate letters, but how many issues can he fill that way? Sooner or later, Sturgeon's Law.

**Sarrantonio:** It's always been that way. Pick up any fiction magazine in the field and find me three stories that are even readable. All these mags have their audience; there's a big audience for dark fantasy, and they're not being fed enough. We need more magazines--this is a pipe dream, but...

**Godwin:** Then you get someone like Scott Edelman of LAST WAVE. He's bannered it "the last best hope of speculative fiction." When you do that, you bloody well better be just that, or you'll play straight man to a lot of razzing. Being young for a writer, what do you see yourself growing into?

**Sarrantonio:** I could write a mainstream novel. I think everyone in this field has a secret wish to break out into the mainstream.

**Godwin:** Over the wall! Leavin' Brigadoon! On to respectability.

**Sarrantonio:** But I made the mistake these last couple of years of reading some of the heralded mainstream novels, like *The White House* by Thomas--yuk. And *The Name of the Rose*--that I liked, but he got lazy the last third of the book. So where am I going? I don't know. How far ahead do you look? It's hard to sit down one night and change direction. It's also very easy to fall on your face.

**Godwin:** Mistakes don't hurt you. It's not even daring to make mistakes that kills you. How do you know when you're good if you don't fall on your face now and then?

**Sarrantonio:** I agree with that.

[The tape ends, so we call a break. Timothy is bellowing his delight over a new discovery; if you pull on the tape in a music cassette, it comes out and out and out in a shiny brown ribbon. Al leaps, then sighs with relief: nothing he really wanted to keep. A patient, good-humored man, he only laughs with Tim and decides it's time to go see the horse. The horse lives in a pasture up the quiet country road, and is a big part of Timothy's day in the summer. We push the stroller along, and I get some pictures. On the way back, I push the baby, Al checks his roadside mailbox: nothing today. We have lunch, another beer. When night comes--country night, the kind I never see in Manhattan--Al unlimbers his telescope and tripod, sets it up down by the pond, and shows me Mars, Jupiter, and its pinpoint moons in

a line.

The next morning, after French toast with Tim, we go at it again. There's another writer beside himself that Al wants to talk about; meanwhile, we're into current trends.]

**Sarrantonio:** I think that Charlie Grant coined the term "dark fantasy" as opposed to straight horror. A lot of younger writers are doing it now, rather than the severed-arm-comes-back-to-haunt-the-former-owner sort of thing: psychological horror that has more to do with mood and characterization.

**Godwin:** For this, there's no better today than Dennis Etchison. His story, "The Dark Country"--

**Sarrantonio:** Yeah!

**Godwin:** Almost nothing happens, but it's so loaded with palpable menace--like his early story, "White Moon Rising."

**Sarrantonio:** I think you can get by if the menace is there from the beginning and hovers over it; that's enough to pull me along, anyway. Of course something happens... but I believe in mood pieces.

**Godwin:** Yesterday, you hit me with some very sad news about a fine writer, Walter Tevis. I hadn't heard that he'd died.

**Sarrantonio:** For my money, Walter Tevis is the great neglected SF writer of this generation. He wrote two masterpieces, *Mockingbird* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. I can't understand why they're not required reading for every serious SF reader, and every fan, period. I put both of those novels in a class with Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz*. I think as time goes on, they'll both come into their own, but it's sad that it couldn't have happened while Walt was still here. He was a very serious writer. He wrote *The Hustler*, but people only knew the book because Paul Newman did the movie. Everyone seems to forget that it was a damned good book on its own, and some probably think it was a novelization of the film. That's the sad story of his career. Walter Tevis was someone who fell through the crack as far as genre goes, a mainstream writer who crossed into SF and never really made it in either field; one of those unclassifiables, and they're the ones who get hurt the worst. I can see why Kurt Vonnegut used to scream, "I am not a science fiction writer!" Because for someone like him, it would have been deadly. He'd drop through the middle. He had the luck to be a popular success. Tevis wasn't. He's got a small body of gemlike work that'll be around a while, but it's sad it couldn't have broken for him earlier.

**Godwin:** Just last week I reread *The Hustler* for the up-then time. It's a shame about the movie of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. The director, Nicholas Roeg, absolutely butchered it.

**Sarrantonio:** Roeg made a crystal-clear story into an incomprehensible mess. I've never seen a bigger butcher job. There's nothing ambiguous about Tevis' book, but the movie makes it seem like a dream sequence. You don't know what the hell is going on half the time.

**Godwin:** To take something that clear and to obscure it takes a negative sort of genius. Another of Tevis' volumes I treasure is his Doubleday collection, *Far From Home*. Some of them are funny as hell, some frightening, like "A Visit From Mother" and "Daddy." You can't escape knowing these stories as savagely autobiographical, something that had to explode from Tevis.

**Sarrantonio:** Also, they're not SF.

**Godwin:** He always got sloughed off by the genre critics, some of whom suffer from undescribed testicles. I'll never understand why *Mockingbird* didn't make more of an impact; it was a brilliant book.

**Sarrantonio:** It is brilliant. I was at Doubleday when it was published, and watched with amazement what happened to it. One of those circumstances when everything conspired to make sure the book failed. It got some good

reviews, but not the right ones at the right time. The advertising came out at the wrong time. Nobody picked up on it, nobody championed it. Even Bantam didn't do the right things at the right time for their [paperback] reprint. Somebody was against that book; it just wasn't its time. It's one of those books that will happen five or ten years from now... unfortunately, long after the author's gone.

**Godwin:** There was a lean quality to Tevis' prose. No self-pity. He took all the negative elements of his life and wrought them into strong, clear prose. It's tragic that his life ended when it did, but he left a small, pure body of work that's going to be remembered in times to come.

**Sarrantonio:** And the books are still there.

**Godwin:** When you have a talent, you've got to keep in training for it, take care of it.

**Sarrantonio:** It's harder than being an athlete. A writer has to be careful of his mind. Mess your mind up and you can't write, it's that simple. I find sometimes, if I am in the middle of something large, like this last book, I'm training for it even when I'm not going to work on it for another ten hours. From the minute I get up, getting things set up, keeping it clear. Fred Pohl defined a writer as one who writes, pure and simple.

**Godwin:** Not one who talks about it.

**Sarrantonio:** Christ no!

**Godwin:** The road to obscurity is paved with unwritten, talked-about books. The hell with posterity, just give me the guts to do ten thousand words today. There are very few times when you're inspired. Mostly it's getting up and knowing you have to get so much done today, x number of words.

**Sarrantonio:** For me, it's got to be 1500 words a day. Not perfect copy, but fixable. That might only take an hour; if I get it, I'm free. If I don't, there's that beautiful Judeo-Christian guilt that gets me to finish. If my five pages end in the middle of a sentence, fine. I've got a place to start the next day.

**Godwin:** Okay, we're winding down. One last question: what trends would you like to see in dark fantasy and horror in the future?

**Sarrantonio:** I'd like to see the same, only more of it, more outlets. There's not enough good stuff being published. Way too much crapola. I'd like to see more character and mood as compared to boogeyman stuff. More of that and well done, but it's not easy. Not too many horror novels that I want to sit down and read these last couple of years. Few and far between, the good reads. I'd like to see more editors out there become more receptive to this stuff and be willing to develop good writers, shore up the field. Now, if you get past the big names--King, Straub, etc.--there isn't all that much out there. I would have to say that (ahem) TOR is one of the good outlets for dark fantasy right now.

**Godwin:** I'd like to see the whole horror field invaded by Monty Python. Now that *Totentanz* is done, any idea of your next immediate project?

**Sarrantonio:** I have definite plans. Harriet McDougal split off about 15,000 words of *Totentanz* which will become the next book, called *Billy*. It's one of the characters from *Totentanz*, but we're taking him out of it for a separate dark fantasy book.

**Godwin:** Want to say good night to the people out in fen country?

**Sarrantonio:** Right--hey! Tim! No! That's a Bozo No-No! Jesus!

[At this point, Timothy found that if he takes a position between the tripod legs of his father's telescope and rocks real hard, Al dives to save them both...]

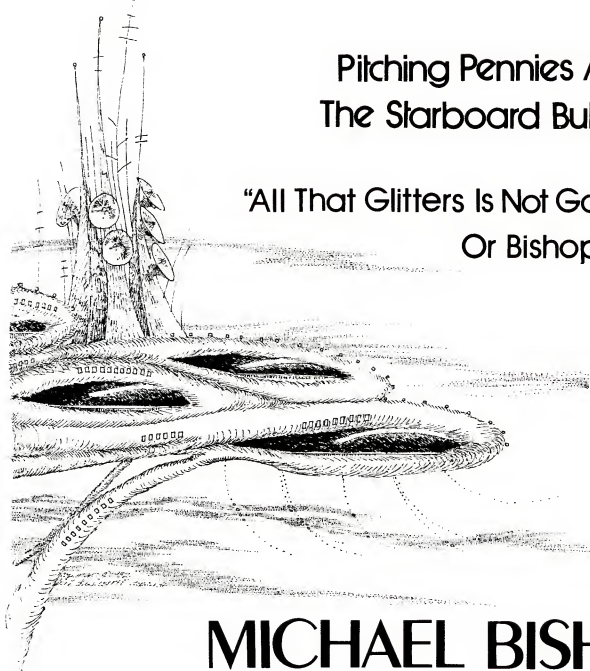
And good night from Putnam Valley.]

- Parke Godwin



# Pitching Pennies Against The Starboard Bulkhead

"All That Glitters Is Not Golding...  
Or Bishop Either"



## MICHAEL BISHOP

### i. By Way of Discursive Preamble

In the Fall of 1983, shortly after William Golding had won the Nobel Prize for Literature, I arranged with the editors of OMNI to write a column for that magazine's periodic feature, "BOOKS / The Arts." Naturally enough (at least for me), I wanted to write about Golding's speculative fiction. In fact, the only other option that I discussed seriously with associate editor Leslie Epstein was an article encompassing James A. Michener's *Space*, Norman Mailer's *Ancient Evenings*, and Gore Vidal's *Duluth*. Each of these recent "mainstream" novels had speculative aspects that made them of potential interest to OMNI readers.

But, I reasoned, these three titles had had plenty of publicity already. Before my article appeared, they would surely receive a great deal more. Therefore, I agitated politely for the Golding assignment; eventually Ms. Epstein got back to me, via long-distance, with an official go-ahead.

I immediately set to work rummaging up everything by Golding in the house: a special edition of *Lord of the Flies* given to me many years ago as a birthday present; a critical edition of the same title, annotated in ink and messily interlinedated, from which I had taught at the Air Force Academy Preparatory School in the late '60s and early '70s; a first edition of the American hardcover of Golding's beguilingly dark prehistoric fantasy *The Inheritors*; an old Berkley/Putnam paperback of the novel *Pincher Martin*; a Mentor paperback entitled *The Genius of the Later English Theatre* containing Golding's play, *The Brass Butterfly*; and the first Ballantine Bal-Hi edition of the peculiar little anthology *Sometime, Never* containing, for the exorbitant sum of fifty cents, novella-length work by John Wyndham and Mervyn Peake, in addition to Golding's "Envoy Extraordinary," on which he later based the aforementioned three-act play. Rediscovering all this good old stuff sent happy memories crashing over and swirling mustily all around me.

But more remained to do than nostalgically mull the grim and/or witty fables that had made *Golding* one of my adolescent favorites--right up there with Bradbury and J. D. Salinger (among living writers) and Kipling and W. Somerset Maugham (among the old boy's departed countrymen). I had to find the *Golding* novels, stories and essays that I had never read, and so I plunged into the card catalogues at two separate libraries in LaGrange, Georgia, seventeen miles from here, and found copies of *The Pyramid* (which has no speculative element at all), *The Spire* (metaphysical fiction of daunting intensity), *The Scorpion God* (a collection of three short novels, including, again, "Envoy Extraordinary"), *The Hot Gates* (a collection of essays and occasional pieces), *Rites of Passage* (a wittily Canadian piece of the sea), and *Darkness Visible* (probably the weirdest piece of work ever to issue from *Golding's* hand). Nowhere, however, could I find a copy of the 1959 novel with the theologically punning title *Free Fall*, but I forged ahead on the cavalier assumption that it did not fit my brief, anyway. (I'd be interested to know if I was right.)

During October, then, I read and reread. My wife Jeri and I took a rare autumn vacation to Savannah, and the books of William *Golding* went with us in the back of our spiro-chassis'd 74 Pinto wagon. "Books on a vacation?" Jeri wondered aloud. "It's okay," I assured her. "Eight-hundred bucks for a four- or five-page review. That's almost eight times what I used to make for twice the wordage at FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION." "It still won't buy us a new car," Jeri told me. She was right about that, of course, and the fact that on the opening leg of our trip we stopped dead in the road seventeen miles north of Cochran, Georgia, and had to be towed, and spent nearly six hours in a mosquito-haunted garage waiting for rescuers to install a new timing belt... well, none of that has any but a wan private relevance to *Golding's* reiterated themes of Hubris and Fall.

Once back from Savannah--that city is a wonder--I completed my reading and wrote my essay. Because Ms. Epstein had suggested that I relate *Golding's* work to that of such high-profile science fictioners as Asimov, Clarke and Herbert (all of whom had novels on the best-seller lists and would therefore be more familiar to OMNI's readers than the latest Nobel Prize winner), I tried very hard to do just that. I even concluded my essay with a couple of fatuous paragraphs in which I divided latter-day American and British SF writers into teams consisting of those who might well embrace *Golding's* bleak assessment of human nature and those who might well turn thumbs down on it. Don't ask me precisely how I arrived at the composition of these teams (Aldiss, Malzberg, Wolfe and Wilhelm were pro-*Golding*, while Clarke, Heinlein, Niven and Pournelle were anti-*Golding*), for I certainly did not bother to poll any of these people and find myself blushing to think that the strategy ever presented itself to me as either defensible or even remotely germane to an intelligent consideration of *Golding's* work, speculative or otherwise.

Leslie Epstein, late in November, telephoned me to let me know that I had Not Quite Got The Assignment Right. (In this, I hasten to add, she was wholly correct.) She suggested that I do some restructuring, place more emphasis on *Golding's* feelings about technology's "potential to redeem or destroy us," cut out the polysyllables (too often a failing of my prose), get rid of a reference to the Swedish poet Harry Martinson, and drop the two paragraphs depicting the members of the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) as participants in a serious ongoing tug-of-war over *Golding's* philosophical views. As Ms. Epstein spoke, I nodded my head, agreeing to almost everything but the absolute necessity of surgically removing poor Martinson from the essay. Three or four days later, I received a letter from Ms. Epstein deftly recapitulating these points.

"Well, I think that's about it," she concluded her critique. "I really think you overestimated your audi-

ence." And she asked me to call her if I had any questions. I should add, too, that her remark about my overestimating my audience was not even an unintentional slur on OMNI's readership, but rather a tactful way of saying that I had been blathering like a constipated academician.

Early in December, almost exactly a year ago as I write today, I sat down to do my revision, accomplished it, and sent it directly to Ms. Epstein. Its arrival prompted another low-key telephone call, during the course of which my long-suffering editor suggested a more anecdotal approach to the material.

In my own low-key, tactful way, I tried to tell Ms. Epstein that because Bill and I did not often hang out together, I was an unlikely source of amusing stories about the laureate. She knew that, of course, but apparently hoped that I would show a little more resourcefulness than I had to date.

I undertook a second revision of the *Golding* piece. Like the first two versions, it came out to approximately 1500 words. This one, too, I dispatched, and not too long thereafter (thank Guccione) I was paid. Still, an original deadline of January 1, 1984, had led me to assume that my essay would appear in OMNI by March, April, or, surely, May. For the longest time, however, I inherited for my promptness a dismaying silence, which was bearable primarily because by February, I had begun working seriously on the novel that should appear in July, 1985, from Arbor House as *Ancient of Days*. Despite the maxim "no news is good news," I had begun to fear that Ms. Epstein had reacted in stunned horror to my latest revision. Even now, God help me, she was probably busy looking for a paper shredder in which to dispose of the deformed by-blow. Worse, even though I had sired a literary cripple, unfit for their pages, the folks at OMNI were going to let me keep my entire fee.

During the spring or early summer--I forget exactly when--Ms. Epstein responded to an inquiry with word that the essay *would* eventually appear. She also told me that the art department had more control over the scheduling of materials than any of the associate editors, and she apologized for not giving me better information on which to feed my insecurity and paranoia. (For accuracy's sake, please disregard that last subordinate clause. However, everyone knows that free-lance writers have insecurity and paranoia the way sailors have scurvy, miners black-lung disease, and desk-jockeys hemorrhoids.)

These kind assurances helped me a little, but by now the June issue was out; and when the July and August issues appeared without my piece on *Golding*, I began to hyperventilate. If it did not get in before the October issue, the Swedish Academy--damn their predictable hides--would go ahead and select the 1984 Nobel Prize laureates, rendering my essay about as timely as a shot of Salk vaccine to the arm of FDR's corpse. So, naturally, I did what any insecure paranoid worth his straightjacket and daily dose of Valium would do: I wrote an imperious letter to Ms. Epstein, bemoaning the fact that by paying me for my essay but failing to run it, OMNI had turned me into a charity case. I had my pride, didn't I? I wasn't in the business just for the jack, I wanted to see the mis-struck labors of my IBM Selectric *in print*. If my essay did not appear--and it seemed to me that the decision against it had already come down--well, Guccione could hardly expect me to write for his glitzy publication again, could he?

Maybe I was a little more temperate than that, but not much. From Ms. Epstein came back word that the *Golding* piece would appear in the September issue; she had already seen it in proofs. (If you have been waiting months for a check to arrive, write an angry letter demanding your money. The check will arrive the day *after* you have mailed your letter.) She told me to expect to find my essay somewhat abbreviated, and told me that she never gave out review assignments on the basis of a writer's financial neediness--OMNI was in business to turn a profit--but in-

stead on the perceived competence of the would-be contributor. I swallowed hard and sent Ms. Epstein what I hope was a suitably apologetic note.

Not too long after that, I received my advance contributor's copies of the September issue of OMNI. For anyone wishing to check out the piece, it appears on page 30. Leslie Epstein should have shared the byline with me. I make this statement more to praise her evident skills as an abridger and rearranger than to level the accusation that OMNI "butchered" my work. If anything, Ms. Epstein brought succinctness to the unwieldy, and coherence to the imprecise. She even inserted an amusing anecdote about Golding that I wish that I, too, had had the good fortune to stumble across and then the good sense to make use of: "For Golding, a balding and bearded schoolmaster of a man, the Nobel was not necessarily a ticket to stardom. The day after he won the \$190,000 prize, a policeman near his home gave him a traffic summons, pointed to a 'No Parking' sign, and asked, 'Can't you read?'"

But—and I believe I can say this without impugning Leslie Epstein's integrity—I feel absolutely no affection for, and take absolutely no pride in, the words about William Golding strung together under my name on page 30 of the September, 1984, issue of OMNI. I wrote some of them, of course, but they don't really belong to me now, and I helplessly pine for certain passages that were excised because of either space limitations or an honest editorial impatience with the more trying aspects of my style in its hell-for-velum lit-crit mode. For which reasons, I am going to follow the 1980 preamble with the third of the three versions of the Golding essay that I submitted to OMNI over a year ago. I may try to clean it up a little as I go, but the clips that ended up on the cutting-room linoleum, I intend to restore.

## ii. The Speculative Fiction of William Golding

Has science fiction really won critical respectability? No one can doubt that it has begun to attract large numbers of readers. In 1983, for instance, Isaac Asimov's *Foundations* Edge, Arthur C. Clarke's *2010: Odyssey Two*, and Robert A. Heinlein's *Friday* all appeared on national bestseller lists. The *Dune* books of Frank Herbert have been a publishing phenomenon for nearly a decade. Critical respectability is another matter. Recently, however, the Swedish Academy may have struck a small blow for the legitimacy of at least one major SF theme—the enormous potential of technology to either destroy or redeem us—by awarding the 1983 Nobel Prize for Literature to England's William Golding.

Like many influential American critics, the members of the Academy often appear to regard science fiction as no more serious or commendable than greeting-card verse. Their only previous choice of a writer who examines the impact of science on our apelike human nature was fellow Swede Harry Martinson, a virtual unknown outside his own country. Martinson's most famous work is the poem cycle *Aniara* (1956). It uses the popular SF concept of the generation starship to make a bleak but often moving assessment of mankind's spiritual shortcomings. Despite the cold beauty of this poem, some critics see Martinson as a hometown favorite who did not deserve the Nobel Prize.

Golding's selection also provoked a small controversy. One angry Academy member (whom Ms. Epstein specifically and correctly identified as "seventy-seven-year-old Arthur Lundkvist" in OMNI's version of this essay) publicly denounced him as a minor figure "of no special interest." But Golding's reputation seems more secure than Martinson's. Although it would be ridiculous to call him an SF writer in any popular sense of the term, Golding has made deliberate use of many of the conventions of the field—most notably after-the-bomb and prehistoric settings—to emphasize the unpopular point that technology, by itself, is not likely to save us from the beast in the human heart.

From *Lord of the Flies* (1954) to *Rites of Passage* (1980), his work has preached the same sobering message. Namely, as he phrases it in his essay "Fable" from *The Hot Gates* (1966), that "we stand today in the same general condition as we have always stood, under sentence of death."

At least half of Golding's twelve [now fourteen] published volumes qualify as noteworthy contributions to the fields of science fiction or philosophical fantasy. His first, *Lord of the Flies*, has the largest following. It also clearly embodies the basic Golding message that education and intelligence are not necessarily antidotes to our fallen human nature. A group of English schoolboys downed on an uninhabited coral island at the beginning of World War II try to establish a society of laws similar to the one they have left. They rapidly decline into savagery and superstition. One of the novel's most chilling ironies is that in the larger world beyond the island, warring adults have fostered a terrible savagery of their own—all in the name of civilization.

*The Inheritors* (1955) looks at our species from a prehistoric rather than a near-future vantage. A remarkable example of anthropological SF, it gives an original portrait of Neanderthal man—previously depicted as a shambling, low-browed, bloodthirsty brute—as gentle and sensitive. (Fossil discoveries revealing elaborate floral tributes at Neanderthal grave sites in present-day Iraq seem to give supporting evidence to this uncanny interpretation.) The "Inheritors" of Golding's title, however, are the technologically advanced Cro-Magnons, our immediate ancestors, who murder the last of the surviving Neanderthals. Again, the strong implication is that although technology may improve our ability either to build or to destroy, it does not impart the wisdom to decide which is better.

Golding makes his clearest statement about human nature and technological progress in his play *The Brass Butterfly* (1958). Based on the novella "Envoy Extraordinary" from the anthology *Sometime, Never* (1956), this three-act drama bears a striking thematic resemblance to Ray Bradbury's 1953 short story "The Flying Machine." In Bradbury's tale, an emperor of ancient China executes the inventor of a flying machine and destroys his device for fear of what others may do with it. In the Golding play, set in the third century A.D., an unnamed Roman emperor sends the inventor Pharoctes to China to keep him from developing—among other troubling contraptions—a steam ship and a printing press. Like his counterpart in Bradbury's fantasy, the emperor fears mankind's vast potential to misuse even the most well-intentioned products of advanced technology.

Says the emperor, "A steam ship, or anything powerful, in the hands of man, Pharoctes, is like a sharp knife in the hands of a child. There is nothing wrong with the knife. There is nothing wrong with the steam ship. There is nothing wrong with man's intelligence. The trouble is his nature."

Both William Golding and his urbane pagan emperor accept the fundamental Judeo-Christian doctrine of humanity's fallen nature. Tellingly, they take their belief in this idea not from abstract theology, but from close observation of their species at work, play and war. Golding commanded a rocket-launching craft during the 1944 invasion of France, and in his essay "Fable" he bluntly observes that "anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee produces honey, must have been blind or wrong in the head."

The early novel *Pincher Martin* (1956) is a direct outgrowth of Golding's war experience. It also dramatizes his fear that in extreme circumstances our "education and intelligence"—a mocking refrain throughout the novel—may not be enough to save us. A British naval officer, after his ship has taken a torpedo, swims to an isolated rock in the Atlantic. Here he attempts to use his wits to survive. Almost predictably, the indifferent forces of sun, sea and sky overwhelm Martin before he can call upon his "education

and intelligence" to combat them. In a reversal similar to that used by Ambrose Bierce in his famous story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," the final page of Golding's novel discloses that Martin died before reaching the rock. Although beautifully written, the pessimistic point of *Pincher Martin* (which has also appeared under the title *The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin*) is sledgehammered home in a way that sabotages hope.

In 1964 Golding published *The Spire*, a book at once more artful and more ambiguous than *Pincher Martin*. A difficult allegory about the desire of a medieval dean to build a 400-foot spire atop his church, the novel says a great deal about the inability of technology to fulfill every human ambition. Both the American and the Soviet manned space programs were getting off the ground—literally—when this book first appeared. The medieval dean's spire may therefore be a cunningly disguised symbol for those upward-rushing rockets. If so, considering the documented success of manned missions since that date, Golding's novel may strike us today as overcautious if not downright fearful. On the other hand, the author might reasonably argue that *The Spire's* implicit warning about the spiritual cost of reckless ambition still holds true.

**Darkness Visible**, a novel about the failure of love in the modern world, appeared in 1979. (One weary critic called it "horrendous and apocalyptic.") Its main character, a crippled Christ figure, emerges as a child from the rubble of the London blitz. He dies over three decades later in a terrorist bombing at a boy's school. Along the way, he receives visitations from benevolent spirits whose influence on twentieth-century events is unhappily on the wane. More a comment on latter-day social and spiritual ills than on technological miscalculations, this strange book contains scenes of poignant force only darkly visible in Golding's previous work. His Nobel Prize may provoke a welcome reassessment of this misunderstood novel.

Does the award signal new critical respect for science fiction? To be cruelly frank, probably not. Most SF writers emphasize humanity's potential to overcome our inborn limits through space exploration, biological engineering, and the creation of new cultural forms. Golding, by contrast, stresses the basic failure of technology to fortify us morally. Using SF conventions, he writes a kind of cautionary anti-SF. The dark lessons of *Lord of the Flies*, *The Inheritors*, and *The Spire*, in particular, serve as unforgettable reminders that although we may be redeemable, we do indeed have something to be redeemed from.

Can we redeem ourselves through recourse to our expanding technological skills?

In his essay "On the Crest of the Wave" from *The Hot Gates*, Golding offers an unequivocal answer: "Our humanity, our capacity for living together in a full and fruitful life, does not reside in knowing things for the sake of knowing them or even in the power to exploit our surround-

ings . . . Our humanity resides in the capacity to make value judgements, unscientific assessments, the power to decide that this is right, that wrong, this ugly, that beautiful, this just, that unjust. Yet these are precisely the questions which "Science" is not qualified to answer."

### iii. Coda

So there it is. OMNI—probably at the bidding of certain nameless culprits in the art department—chose to delete the paragraphs on *Pincher Martin* and *Darkness Visible*. I might add that this brief essay contains no mention at all of my favorite Golding novel (excepting, of course, *Lord of the Flies*, which has earned its status as a classic), *Rites of Passage*, a brilliant comedy of manners set on the high seas at the height of the Victorian debate over Darwinism, among other matters. And, earlier this year, 1984, Golding published yet another novel, *The Paper Men*, satirizing the world of Academia. Further, after writing my essay, I discovered that in 1982 he had released a second volume of his nonfiction, *A Moving Target*.

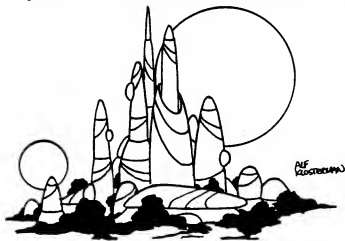
In this last-named collection, I would recommend to aficionados of science fiction (which Golding somewhat bemusedly acknowledges that he has been accused of writing) an essay entitled "Utopias and Antiutopias." Herein he says, "The trouble with the writing of SF is its complete freedom of manoeuvre. Once you accept the premise of knowledge and power increasing world without end you are carving in butter rather than stone. There are hundreds of dully competent SF writers who can just keep your attention as cards just keep it when you are playing patience. It does not much matter whether you say a city is on the moon or Alpha Centauri when the inhabitants are paper cutouts and the story recognizably one of cops and robbers. Perhaps SF is running out of steam, the way ghost stories seem to have done." If he saw the squib about himself and his work in OMNI (a doubtful proposition, at best), he may well have cringed to encounter it there.

In "Utopias and Antiutopias," however, he does go on to remark that there are "many better things than [Galaxy]-spanning rehashes of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* in SF." He mentions Ray Bradbury's story "The Fire Balloons," *Childhood's End* and 2001 by Arthur C. Clark [sic], C. S. Lewis's theological speculation novels, and some fairly obvious titles by George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell. Commenting on these writers and their works, he makes the insightful observation, "The antiutopian wants to be proved wrong. No antiutopian desires to be hurt. But he has looked into the face of man rather than in statistical humanity. He knows, too, that the clock does not stop."

Golding acknowledges that *Lord of the Flies*—or, at least, its prevailing tone—qualifies as antiutopian. And, on February 13, 1977, the date on which he first delivered "Utopias and Antiutopias" as a talk, he recants this position by admitting that "time marches on" and "I no longer feel antiutopian." He adds that sooner or later "we shall have to get off our bicycle"—i.e., quit this life, surrender this world to either our hubris or the implacable forces of entropy—but that he does not find the prospect of *Humanity's* ultimate extinction "distasteful," for what more properly concerns most people is "the future of you and me and our children's children."

He concludes his talk, "We had better decide we are Lamarckian and make it work. We must produce *homo moralis*, the human being who cannot kill his own kind, nor exploit them or rob them. Then no one will need to write utopias, satires, or antiutopias for we shall be inhabitants of utopia as long as we can stay on the bicycle; and perhaps a little—not much, but a little—dull." The pessimist has let the corner of one lip creep up in a tentative smile. The prophet has prophesied.

— Michael Bishop



# THRUST PROFILE:



# PHILIP JOSE FARMER

by E. E. Gilpatrick

To paraphrase Karl Marx, once a people are cut off from a knowledge of their past, they can be led to believe anything. To put this same concept somewhat more succinctly, the past is prelude. Science fiction as a distinct genre had its beginnings within the lifetime of some who are still active in the field today. One of those authors involved in SF since nearly its start is Philip Jose Farmer, whose current daily production of writing would put to shame many writers who are many years his junior.

Before Hugo Gernsbach gave science fiction its own literary genre, SF was primarily considered to be a specialized branch of romantic writing. Farmer recalls Gernsbach to have been an inveterate label-hanger. Gernsbach often asked his writers what this new field of fiction should be called; the early appellation was "scientification," but the later consensus was that science fiction was a better label.

Whatever his idiosyncracies, science fiction writers pay homage to Gernsbach each year when awarding the Hugo Awards. And it was on that early Gernsbach stone that the internationally renowned writing skills of Philip Jose Farmer were honed.

Farmer made his first major submission in 1946, to the SATURDAY EVENING POST. The POST editors agreed that the writing was excellent, but had problems with a drunk scene in the story which they felt was a bit too earthy for their readers. They agreed to publish the story if Farmer would cut that one scene. Farmer refused and published the story instead in ADVENTURE magazine.

Those who had missed the arrival of Farmer's talent on the fiction horizon in 1946 were shocked into awareness of his abilities when "The Lovers" was published in 1952. The story had evolved from some of Farmer's studies in parasitology. The story caused a hullabaloo because of the sexual content of its theme and plot. Farmer was lambasted by many who felt sex not to be a proper subject for science fiction, and according to some he suffered damage to his reputation from which he still suffers. But most science fiction fans did not agree regarding the exclusivity of sex and SF; "The Lovers" helped Farmer win a Hugo Award as the SF field's "Best New Author" in 1953, the first year the Hugos were awarded.

Since then he has authored more than 40 books, which have been translated into 15 different languages. As with many of the field's best writers, he as well known internationally as he is in the U.S. He has won two more Hugos, and developed an avid audience for his work. Early paperback editions of Farmer's novels which originally sold for 35¢ now commonly sell for up to \$10 at SF conventions and used book fairs.

Farmer's detractors still justify their position by pointing out that his characters dissect their pregnant wives, slap their girlfriends around, and get their kicks by castrating their enemies. Regardless, Harlan Ellison has called Farmer one of the "few truly good people I know."

Philip Jose Farmer was born in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1918. He enrolled at the University of Missouri in 1936, but was forced to leave after just one year due to lack of funds. His writing career was interrupted by World War II, in which he served. After the war, he completed his studies to earn his degree in 1950. His first book, *The Green Odyssey*, was published in 1957. In 1966, his novel *Night of Life* was nominated for a Nebula. His novella, "Riders of the Purple Wage," which was published in the first *Dangerous Visions*, won him his second Hugo Award in 1968, and his novel *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* (the first in the Riverworld series) won him another Hugo in 1972.

Farmer's writing continues to defy pigeonholing. He is generally considered an SF writer, but not of the hard science variety. His approach and insight in fantasy writing is unquestioned. If there is an area in which Farmer is unique, it is his ability to masterfully wed SF with fantasy. Farmer makes no secret of the fact that he believes one of the essential elements of skillful writing is strict discipline. He has studied his craft so assiduously, many consider him to be the ultimate fantasy writer. But this is not what he intended when he began writing. When asked how he feels about being labeled a fantasy writer, Farmer replies, "I know it bothers some writers, but it doesn't bother me any to be labeled this or that. For example, I plan to do a mainstream novel entitled *Pearl Diving in Peoria*.

"I did a mainstream novel called *Fire and the Night*. It came out in 1957, I think; I'm not sure. It had to do with both religion and race relations. I've also sold a couple of mainstream stories to PLAYBOY."

Farmer frankly admits that his original desire was to become a mainstream writer. As a youngster he read a lot. From his encyclopedic knowledge of the fantasy writing of that period—L. Frank Baum, Edgar Rice Burroughs, the Doc Savage books—it is apparent that he was a voracious



reader. Farmer believes that most SF and fantasy writers are voracious readers, and have been since they were young.

He says that he thought about becoming a writer when he was very young, but "It seemed to take a long time for me to get around to it."

In recent years there has been a burgeoning interest in soft core fantasy, soft core science fiction, and stories which revolve around magic. Farmer considers magic and fantasy to be synonymous. To him, magic is merely a branch of science we just don't know much about. Under this premise, science can be considered a branch of science fiction. "I don't care what you call it; I don't care at all. I've been on a lot of panels during conventions, you know, where they discuss what science fiction is, what fantasy is, and all that. I've seen a lot of controversy in fanzines and other places. We just got stuck with an unfortunate label." Apparently Farmer never did absorb Hugo Gernsback's fascination for labels.

In 1953, Farmer admits that in addition to being pleased at winning his first Hugo, he discovered that he was naive about the world of writing. He was invited to the science fiction convention held in Chicago in 1952. "I met a lot of authors that I had been reading, and a lot of fans. I may have been vaguely aware that there were fans who wrote to each other and published these fanzines, but it didn't make much impression on me. That's where I first became aware that the science fiction world really was a rather small world, but one that was close and intimate."

"I became involved to a certain extent with these fans, inasmuch as I met these people at conventions and they would send me fanzines. I'd read the reviews and the feuds that always seemed to be going on. It was a brand new world to me."

"The field has snowballed since then. There are now 550 writers in the Science Fiction Writers of America. What was once considered a sub-literary genre is now being taught in at least a thousand universities, colleges and high schools in America, and it's also being taught overseas."

Farmer's most recent novel, **Day World**, has been optioned to Norman Lear's Embassy Productions. Background movie scenes are already being shot. Farmer smiles, taking the attitude that most authors must learn to take regarding movies of their books. Most major SF books get optioned out to some movie production company, and most of Farmer's novels have been optioned. But it appears that **Day World** may very well become the first of his works to make it to the silver screen. Even background shooting is no guarantee that a movie will be finished and distributed, but it is a good sign.

In November of 1984, an anthology of Farmer stories was released by Berkley Books in conjunction with Byron Price, called **The Grand Adventure**. It is third in their "Masterworks in Science Fiction and Fantasy" series of illustrated trade paperback editions. For many years, Phil Farmer has been trying to get started on the mainstream novel he plans to call **Pearl Diving in Old Peoria**. But first he has to do a 10,000-word autobiography for Gale Research, and an article on the planet Uranus for Byron Price. When that's done, he wants to start the sequel to **Day World**. Farmer sighs and looks longingly; then perhaps he can get to writing this longed-for novel, **Pearl Diving in Old Peoria**.

With the passing of each literary giant, the place of the remaining Titans like Farmer takes on that much more significance. Recently, Truman Capote joined the ranks of the immortals. Among the results of Capote's death was the dissemination of certain strong opinions which Capote had held for some time. One of the most controversial was Capote's view that editors and publishers are increasingly exerting an undue influence on contemporary writing.

Farmer, who has never been known for his shyness on any subject, agrees. "I find that there's an increasing tendency on the part of editors to monitor your writing.

Some of that is for the good, if it helps to correct inconsistencies, contradictions, bad writing, and the like, but I have found that editors and publishers are getting much more aware of what they think will sell, and the result is for editors to suggest cutting down on stuff they think will slow up a novel, even though the part they want to cut may be very relevant to the novel, or they will suggest expanding some areas. In general, though, anything that gets in the way of the action, they want to cut out."

"The individual writer is going to be affected because he or she may have built up a body of works and attracted quite a following. That following may like certain things in that writer's works which the editor may come to regard as eccentric or irrelevant and want to cut."

"When I started writing, for a long time I was subject to attempted censorship by editors and publishers who were afraid of reaction from the conservative element; now, you get censorship from the editors who're afraid of reaction from the liberal type of reader. Let me cite one case. One writer created a scene in a Colorado cafe where there were a bunch of truck drivers talking. They were giving vent to their opinions on homosexuals—pretty realistic stuff. The editors made a determined effort to call the author at the last minute and get him to change the way the truckers talked about homosexuals. Now the writer himself had no hostility towards homosexuals, but he knew how truckers talked, and if he tried to make the truckers talk like they were sympathetic, it wouldn't be realistic. It would be false. I think he did manage to cram it through."

"Or for instance my **Barnstormer** book, which took place in 1923 during the Harding administration. There was a secret U.S. invasion of the Land of Oz. The hero wrote a letter to President Harding saying that even though he was still proud he was an American, there were a lot of evils in this country which needed to be rectified. Then, I made the statement that all countries have always had various evils in their histories. This one editor wanted to cut that sentence. He just wanted the U.S. alone to be pointed out. Well, I didn't put up with that. Also, the hero referred to the Munchkins as pygmies. This editor said she thought that was cruel. I had to point out that pygmy is an anthropological term. If you call someone a pigmy, it could be regarded as an insult or perjorative, but if you're referring to a group of people whose stature is 4-foot-five-inches or less, well, they are pygmies. I could go on and on."

"But it's funny you know. You used to get censorship from the conservatives. Now the liberals are trying to do the same thing because of overreaction. But I'm still writing the same thing I used to write. Various editors do have their own ideologies, conservative or liberal or extremely radical on both sides. The main thing, I think, is that they're worried too much about the reaction of their readers. They're thinking that if too many of their readers don't like what the author says, they're not going to buy more books. I think that's ridiculous!"

Farmer agrees that his point of view begs the classic argument of bank balance versus art. To this Farmer replies, "That's the main line. Well, publishers are in business to sell books, but I think they go too far in trying to influence various writers in regards to what they say and what they can't say. Censorship is still going on, or attempted censorship."

In relation to the current science fiction market, there are those who feel the trend has been and still is toward what is called "soft" science fiction, often with a liberal lacing of magic or fantasy. It has been with this type of fiction that Farmer has made his mark. "I'm not known as a 'hard' science fiction writer, but I regard biology as a hard science, and I have written a lot of biological stuff. I've written a lot of sociological and psychological stuff, and historical science fiction. The only thing I can say about fantasy is that there's far too

Cont. on page 22

# Sex, Swords, and Superstition



## A Close Look at PHYLLIS ANN KARR'S Thorn and Frostflower

Janrae Frank

Phyllis Ann Karr is known chiefly as a writer of elegant and eloquent Regency Romances. Her fantasy tales have made their way through the small press, especially in the 1970s semi-prozine *FANTASY AND TERROR*, for which she wrote a series of exquisite stories about a young toymaker named Torin. Her two sword and sorcery novels, *Frostflower and Thorn* and *Frostflower and Windbourne* are considered minor classics in the mainstream feminist community and were well-received by the SF/fantasy field. Her mismatched duo, the pacifist sorceress Frostflower and her foul-mouthed, superstitious Amazon protector Thorn, are a decidedly engaging pair. But four years ago, Thorn was the provocateur who made Karr a small cause célèbre that left a wealth of hard feelings in the professional science fiction community, and at this point appears to have put an end to the award-winning fantasy anthology series, *Amazons*, which Jessica Amanda Salmonson edited for DAW Books. Unfortunately, very little of this meleé can be explicitly presented to the general SF public, because the main battles were fought in the pages of *FORUM*, published by the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA). Quoting, and perhaps even paraphrasing or alluding to, the contents of issues of *FORUM* is expressly forbidden, to assure continuance of the open exchange of views the magazine now affords.

The basic facts of the situation, however, are a matter of public record. In 1981, amid a hail of verbal fireworks and accusations of sexism leveled at him by Salmonson, Donald Wollheim exercised his publisher's prerogative and ordered a story by Karr, one that featured Thorn without Frostflower, deleted from the second volume of *Amazons*. When the smoke had cleared from this firefight, which included a spirited and eloquent defense of Wollheim by C. J. Cherryr and Andre Norton, Salmonson and Wollheim were quits. There would never be another volume of *Amazons* published by DAW Books. (Wollheim, not being one to give up a lucrative market, soon replaced *Amazons* with the more literary but less satisfying *Swords & Sorceresses* series, edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley.) The Thorn story, "Two Days Out of Sludgepocket," was replaced in the anthology by another Karr story, "The Robber Girl." When asked how she felt about the quarrel provoked by her story, Karr replied, "Bemused."

Now, four years later, "Two Days Out of Sludgepocket" is again scheduled for publication, this time in the pages of *FIGHTING WOMAN NEWS*, a small press feminist martial arts magazine published and edited by Valerie Eads.\* Ms. Eads was kind enough to provide me with a xerox of the manuscript to preview.

The impending publication of this story provides the opportunity for a deeper look into Karr's writing, the issues of the stories, the story's censorship, censorship in general, and certain extremes in feminist writing which have recently become a cause of controversy among male and female critics.

For all its controversy, the plot of "Sludgepocket" is somewhat standard fare for sword and sorcery fiction: a band of thieves (Amazons in this case) attack a lone merchant wagon for which Thorn, Karr's swordswoman protagonist, is the only guard. She fares well against the attackers, until a male warrior practically waves his genitals in her face and startles her so badly that she loses her stride and is overcome. Why started? Because in Karr's world, there are no male warriors. Men are too highly valued to be put at risk, even though, like India's sacred cows, there are plenty of them.

According to Wollheim, he pulled the story because he

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felt that the large amounts of sex, violence, and obscene language were too much for the average reader--especially the audience that DAW's editorial policy is directed toward. One can see Wolheim's point. The strong thematic underpinnings, where the depiction of atrocities is the vehicle for illuminating some aspect of the human condition or the workings of the human mind, that enables readers to cope with the ugly realism of such science fiction classics as Ellison's "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" is simply not there in "Sludgepocket." Moreover, since the story is short (5500 words), shock value seems the sole purpose of many scenes in the story, such as the lone male warrior committing incest on his mother's corpse, or his companions preparing to force Thorn's merchant into an act of necrophilia prior to burning him alive with the slain outlaw. (In the end, Thorn prevails over this adversity.)

Actions of the same intensity occur in Karr's novels, but in longer works there is space to breathe between the atrocities and time to set them up so they do not appear to be there mainly for their effect. These scenes are always the turning points in a character's perception of reality or the blade that slices out new and sometimes unexpected aspects of cultural or individual characterization.

Phyllis Ann Karr's novels are subtle studies of religious doubt, ethics and the quality of justice. She has envisioned a patriarchy where women are considered of little worth and very expendable. There are four castes in this world. There are the ruling farmer-priests and their wives and children, who are protected from the common rabble by carefully fostered religious superstition and the belief in their personal sanctity, the merchants and laborers, the common folk, and, at the bottom, a caste of amazon warriors--the expendable women.

The sorceri are a fourth quasi-caste of outsiders possessed with strange gifts. Intellectual, less given to superstition, monotheists as opposed to the polytheist farmers, celebrate and virginal, they are vowed to never hurt another living thing. Yet the farmers blame them for everything from missing chickens to blighted crops to unexpected deaths, finding them to be most convenient scapegoats.

When I heard about Thorn's foul mouth and an incident of abusiveness regarding a male character in one of Karr's stories, my initial reaction was that it simply represents reverse sexism. I had been expecting this turn of events for a long time because many very famous and celebrated feminist works of science fiction are either anti-male or contain elements of female chauvinism. After reading the novels, however, I realized that I was wrong. Certainly the exquisitely foul-mouthed Thorn could be called Fantasy's first female chauvinist pig heroine. Her contempt for the overprotected males of her society is biting and lewdly expressed. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that it is the contempt of a highly proficient lower-class individual for the less sexually-oriented, less "street-wise" members of the upper classes -- the traditional sour grapes of basic class prejudice. A good example of this occurs when in *Frostflower and Thorn*, the warrior finds herself pregnant and promptly kicks her lover, the merchant Spendwell who employs her in Sludgepocket, down the stairs, even though she knows he is not the child's father. The complexly-characterized Thorn, however, still harbors the male-protective tabus of her culture, and is often at odds with herself when she must harm a male.

The plot of *Frostfire and Thorn* is highly original, about a struggle for custody of a newborn child which has come into Frostflower's loving possession, and which the priest Maldron decides she has stolen. Thorn, broke and down on her luck, finds she cannot afford a "bribe" to end her pregnancy, and pregnant warriors are unable to find work. Thorn then encounters Frostflower for the first time, who desperately wants a child of her own, but would lose her powers if she gave up her virginity. So she sorceres the baby out of Thorn's body by speeding time in

exchange for the child. The farmers view all acts of magic as blasphemous and routinely destroy anyone or anything that has violated their perception of the order of things, and would destroy the child if they knew how he was born. Thorn therefore can't admit to being Starwind's mother, lest they discover the means of his birth, and the priests know that Frostflower, as a Sorceri, is celebrate and virginal. Maldron, the priest, is convinced that the child was stolen by the sorceress.

Thorn starts out superstitious, a firm believer in her gods; but when Frostflower and the child are captured by the priests, her sense of justice starts itching and she goes to Frostflower's aid, in spite of believing that saving Frostflower will doom her to Hell, thus mirroring the classic Japanese conflict between conscience and duty. She soon comes to question her religious beliefs.

Frostflower will not betray the nature of Starwind's birth despite rape and torture. Innara, a sensitive priestess who (like Frostflower) longs for a child, questions the justice of her husband Maldron's torturing the gentle sorceress to discover the identity of Starwind's parents.

Increasingly over the last ten years, and especially over the last four, feminist critics have perceived science fiction and fantasy novels as "politically correct" only if the female protagonist possessed the qualities of machismo; they didn't cry or have gentle feelings, they were against childbearing, or they sidestepped the issue entirely as in Jessica Amanda Salmonson's *The Golden Naginata*. Furthermore, a large percentage of professed feminist writers are producing fiction whose sole feminist characteristic is the machismo of their heroines. What I believe makes Karr's novel feminist is not the macho viewpoints of Thorn and her fellow warriors, but that this is a novel of women and their desires regarding children, something that is integral to being female. Innara has been barren and wants Starwind for her own. Frostflower desperately wants motherhood, but not at the cost of her powers. Thorn, on the other hand, views child-bearing as an inconvenience to be avoided at all costs. It all comes down to a custody battle that would have pleased the leaders of the Spanish Inquisition, with bloodshed, torture, rape and death.

Never before have the emotional drives and the very nature of motherhood been brought up in fantasy fiction. That alone would make it a must read, but there is far more in Karr's novels.

Religious prejudice has been presented in the novels of other writers, but not with the gritty realism that pervades Karr's work. Her grasp of how superstition can shape the actions of people, allowing them to justify the cruelties they inflict on those whose of different beliefs is profoundly believable and troubling. The parallels to our own Moral Majority make Karr's work all the more disturbing.

The narrative is smoothly and compellingly told. By the novel's end, no one is left with their perceptions and beliefs unshaken. The single flaw is that Maldron is never given his turn to speak for himself. We have only his dialog and the words of others through which to judge his actions. Why does he defy his gods to keep Starwind after learning of the child's unnatural birth? Does he desire the baby because it is unique and magical? Or for his barren wife whom he loves? The question is not answered to my satisfaction.

Between the end of the first book (*Frostflower and Thorn*) and the beginning of the sequel (*Frostflower and Windbourne*), the little sorceress has the adventure detailed in the short story, "The Forbidden Scroll." This story is still at the time of the writing, however, unsold. I have read a copy of the manuscript kindly provided by Phyllis Ann Karr, and it differs dramatically from "Sludgepocket," partly because Thorn does not appear in it. Frostflower has been granted access to the library of Elvannon, a farmer-priest, in which certain scrolls are forbidden. Frostflower mistakenly blunders into a forbid-

den cubicle and reads the first part of a tabu scroll before realizing what she has done. Her conscience bothers her for the rest of the story. Finally, after saving Elvanon's crops from an early freeze, she confesses her inadvertent transgression, and is, after much soul searching by the farmer, forgiven. There isn't an ugly word or violent scene in the entire story. It is a lovely and delicate pastel that deals primarily with the subject of trust and understanding.

The sequel novel, *Frostflower and Windbourne*, is a detective story in which Thorn rescues a male sorceri, Windbourne, who has been falsely accused of magically murdering a priest and is to be stripped of his powers (raped) and put to death. Thorn, who is quickly losing her regard for the sanctity of priests and men, suspects that the priest was poisoned by another priest. Windbourne decides that he cannot live with the murder laid upon his head and goes back to proclaim his innocence to Elea, the priest's widow. Frostflower goes along, and Thorn accompanies them as protector, thinking the whole idea to be crazy and suicidal.

The only thing that makes this book thematically feminist is the self-actualization of Elea. She is discovering the joys of independence, free of male authority, as she oversees the farm she has inherited from her late husband. Elea muses that she would like to see her daughters as content with their lives, and as in charge of them, as she is.

Though still a novel of women, this book concentrates still more strongly than the first on questions of religious faith and superstition. Elea is going against religious teachings by not remarrying and surrendering her farm to a male's authority. She is also conducting forbidden agricultural experiments.

Frostflower has retained her powers in spite of being raped in the first book. This goes against all religious beliefs of the sorceri; it should have been impossible. So Frostflower turns to the farmers, hoping to discover in their religious writings the answers and solace she can no longer find in her own faith.

Windbourne believes in his god, but not in himself; the power has never come easily to him. Frostflower believes in herself, but doubts her god. More to the point, Windbourne is the other side of the coin of superstition, with a raft of them so large as to make the reader wonder who is the more bedeviled with impossible notions: the farmers or the sorceri? I enjoyed his argument with Thorn, directed at Frostflower, that the farmers make their hard yellow cheese by throwing a cow's stomach in with the curds, which horrified Frostflower, who like all sorceri are vegetarians, and who had been enjoying the cheese for a year.

Karr plays two sorceri off against each other in skillful philosophical contrast, establishing that in every religion there is a measure of baseless superstition and prejudice, no matter how logical and intellectual that religion strives to be.

The second contrast is provided by the open-minded and sincerely religious, if unconventional, Elea and her hypocritical brother Rondasu. Though they take up less of the book than Frostflower and Windbourne, they are strongly characterized and just as effectively depicted in their differing outlooks and deeds, especially as this murder mystery/adventure nears its conclusion.

Ironically, the only two Thorn and Frostflower short stories to see print have been published by DAW Books, Karr's antagonists in the "Sludgepocket" controversy. They appear in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Swords and Sorceresses* anthologies (*Amazons'* successful DAW sibling), and both do have Frostflower present to mitigate Thorn. These two stories also differ from the two books and "Sludgepocket" and "The Forbidden Scroll" in that they have Frostflower and Thorn exploring alternate worlds, and don't really belong in the main and growing cannon of the Thorn stories.

I therefore won't discuss them further, except to note that the violence and savagery of "Sludgepocket" is not in these stories.

The question has been raised by several people who read "Sludgepocket" in manuscript whether the story was anti-male. Thorn espouses a strong contempt for those three members of the opposite sex present, and "brick" is a casually derogatory term used by all women present in the same manner as male novelists use the term "bitch." All the males in "Sludgepocket" are contemptible and/or pathetic creatures. If the novels did not exist and "Sludgepocket" was left to stand alone, it would be entirely reasonable to accuse Karr of being prejudiced against men.

A lot of feminist works of science fiction and fantasy, starting with Russ's *The Female Man*, have tended to be anti-male and nearly, if not entirely, misanthropic as well. The answer to whether Karr's writing is also guilty of this depends upon her treatment of the male characters in her novels. In the first book we have cowardly Spendwell, who partially redeems himself by the novel's end, and Maldron, who is strong, direct and courageous, but lacking in true compassion and kindness. In the sequel, we briefly meet the compassionate farmer-priest Elvanon, but then spend the rest of the novel with the peevish, pedantic Windbourne and the unscrupulous Rondasu. If the final volume of Karr's trilogy ever gets written--Karr has not yet gotten approval on either of the two alternate outlines sitting on the Berkley editor's desk--the main villain will again be male. The only really honorable and admirable people in Karr's novels are women. I don't think this makes Karr anti-male any more than I believe that the reverse makes a male writer a misogynist.

Male writers whose women characters, though redeemed by other qualities, are of lesser physical, spiritual, moral or intellectual stature than the majority of their male characters, find themselves being accused of being male chauvinist pigs. If these accusations are considered true, then by the same standards some women authors are also guilty of sexism.

Maybe women and men simply find it natural to write most deeply about their own sex and do not deliberately slight their depiction of the opposite sex. After all, a man will usually understand men better than women, from first-hand experience, and visa-versa. So the tendency to make all the most strongly delineated and positively presented characters members of one's own sex appears to be, in many cases, a question of natural inclination rather than conscious prejudice.

As for the question of excessive violence, I would have to admit that Karr's work is full of the atrocities, hypocrisy, and religious/philosophical persecutions common to all authoritarian power structures, matriarchal or patriarchal, religious or lay. Her novels, however, take the time to make these philosophical and thematic connections, thus making the ugliness understandable and more or less acceptable in their literary contexts.

Ultimately, perhaps, the most provocative question aroused by "Sludgepocket" has to do not with past censorship but with future censorship. For, if as the anti-pornography feminists claim, stories that portray women as objects of violent conquest or domination violate the civil rights of women and should be censored, then don't stories with those roles reversed violate the rights of men and likewise deserve censorship? If so, a large portion of current feminist science fiction and fantasy, which characterizes all males as shallow, venal and brutish, could also be subject to censorship and oppression.

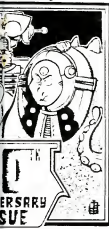
In which case, a number of the feminists who protested Karr's censorship in 1981 may be the same ones who, by calling for the censorship of certain male writers, may very well be setting into motion events which could result in their own future censorship.

- Janrae Frank





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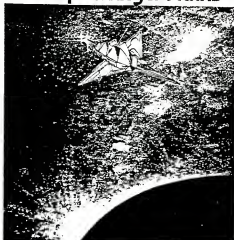
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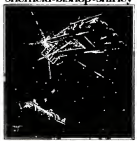
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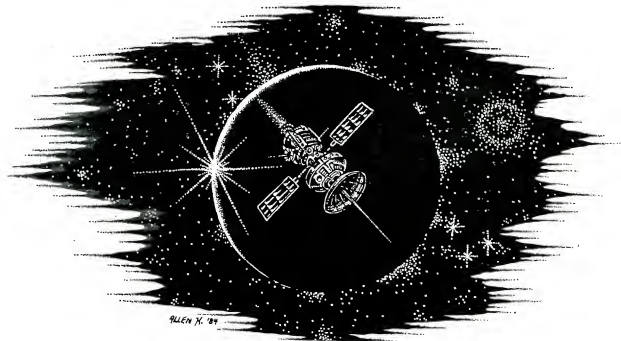
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# WORDS & PICTURES



## movie reviews ~ darrell schweitzer

Let's face it: adult science fiction films are rare. Virtually all cinema offerings in this area are aimed at fifteen-year-olds of all ages, with the exception of something like *The Ewok Adventure*, which was made for retarded six-year-olds of all ages, and the quite infrequent adult effort which genuinely tries to reach the level of written SF. The last one I can think of was *Bladerunner*, and its commercial degree of success was hardly something to encourage more producers to try.

Now we've suddenly seen two major, seriously-intended adult science fiction films come out in the same month: December 1984. Does this herald the coming of a new era?

I doubt it. One of the two was *Dune*, you see. I am told by an illustrious Washington, D.C.-area writer that after the Special World Premiere of *Dune* on December 3rd in that city, the main topic of conversation was just *how much* money the film was going to lose. To see *Dune* is to understand why; and yet, in some ways it is an impressive film. In some ways it's a shame that Dino De Laurentiis will lose money on this one; it's his first honest effort. It will also probably be his last.

The fatal weakness is in the script. This is a badly written film. Without a decent script, even good actors have no good lines to deliver, no dramatic scenes to act out, et cetera. Some may disagree, but I believe that without good characterization *in the script*, without the screenwriter having discovered what sort of people his characters are, the actors will not be able to project complete personalities on the screen. How else can we account for very capable actors and actresses (Max von Sydow, Sian Phillips, Patrick Stewart--whom I remember best as Sejanus in *I, Claudius*) coming across as near-ciphers?

If it is possible for actors to create characterizations which are not in the script, and if the director will let them, then possibly a movie such as *Dune* could be saved. But this did not happen.

The failure was to *find the story*. *Dune* might best be called *Highlights from Dune*. In an attempt to remain faithful to the book (a laudable goal, since if the book is not worth being faithful to, something else should be filmed instead), director-writer David Lynch has reduced virtually *all* the characters to walk-on parts. Duncan Idaho is fairly important in the book. On the screen, he is merely someone who appears a few times, obviously some long-time close friend of Paul Atreides, to whom we are never even introduced. When he dies, we feel nothing. Dr. Yueh (Dean Stockwell) plays a pivotal role, his character is never developed, so his motivations make no sense at all. There are many more, including von Sydow's character, whose significance is simply not touched upon in the film. Paul's Fremen lover, Chani (Sean Young), is allowed to strike and occasional pose, but has nothing to *do* in the film. In fact, few of the cast have anything to do, except put in an obligatory appearance or two since their character was in the novel. Lynch failed to cut away any of the sub-plots and minor characters until he had a story that could be clearly presented and stand by itself.

Further, he was so desperately afraid of being misunderstood that the film is laden with exposition; there may be as much voice-over as dialogue in the film. (At least it *seems* that way.) A certain amount is necessary, but *every* new element is explained to the audience. Is the background to this novel so awesomely complex that it requires all this explanation? I don't think so. Much of it is

quite familiar, even to **Star Wars** and **Star Trek** fans: galactic monarchies, hyperstatal travel, psi-talents. The Fremmen culture does require explanation, but little is given. Lynch clearly does not know when to use exposition, and (more importantly) when not to use it. At one point Paul sees his mother look anxious; voice-over: "What does she fear?" Well, we could tell from his mother's face that she is afraid, and from Paul's face that he is concerned. No explanation is needed. Max von Sydow plays an ecologist on Arrakis. After Duke Leto shows more concern for miners' lives than the spice, the ecologist thinks in voice-over: "I think I like this Duke." But this is totally irrelevant since Duke Leto is killed shortly thereafter, and no relationships develop. That the people on Arrakis like the Atreides better than the Harkonnens is too obvious to need mentioning, but Lynch stops the film to do so. Indeed, this film is stopped a lot. The expository sections seem static. The actors frequently stare into the camera while their thoughts are heard.

It would be hard to tell from this film whether any of these actors and actresses have any talent. Paul Atreides, played by unknown Kyle MacLachlan, fails to come alive. But this may not mean that MacLachlan is a bad actor, since nobody's characters come alive in this movie. Kenneth McMillan as Baron Harkonnen, Sting as Feyd Harkonnen and Paul Smith as Rabban Harkonnen all manage to convey a sense of nastiness by the most outrageous gloating, hissing, drooling and callousness. But they are all caricatures, like the Klingons in **The Search for Spock**. These seem to be good actors in one-dimensional roles.

So with the human element of **Dune** a dismal failure, we can only sit back and watch. I suspect Lynch thinks a movie is entirely a visual experience—with such an impressive look, who cares about the story?—and there's no denying that this movie is impressive visually. The costuming is gorgeous. The sets are extremely elaborate, but give the impression of a galactic culture obsessed with interior decorating. (The good guy Atreides have an art-deco, neo-Zarist style; they wear handsome uniforms, have palaces with lots of nice woodwork and fancy metal decorations. The Harkonnens wear ugly rubber suits, and have an architectural style best described as Sewage Treatment Plant Modern. Yet when House Atreides takes over Arrakis after years of Harkonnen rule, all the interiors are in Atreides style. One can only assume that their first priority was getting everything redone.) The ships and assorted machinery are also impressive. It is hard to forget the Giger-esque control room where the grotesque Third Stage Navigators fold space amid impressive special effects.

You also will not forget the sandworms, which are truly awesome, particularly in medium to long shots. They may be the most successful screen realization of an imaginary creature ever; they're like a John Schoenherr painting come to life.

But the look of a film is not enough to make it successful. Lynch tries so hard on the visuals that he neglects all else. Such an approach may have worked in **Eraserhead**, but it did not in **Dune**.

**2001: Odyssey Two**, on the other hand, has wonderful visuals, but never loses track of the story. It is a triumphant success, sufficiently good, in fact, to justify the existence of the novel by Arthur C. Clarke. The book is best described as a good Clarke pastiche, and, beyond magnificent descriptions of the Jovian system, had little going for it. The film, while faithful scene by scene, manages to add a human dimension lacking in the novel's characterizations. Unlike Lynch, Peter Hyams who scripted and directed **2001** understands the need for characters with discernable personalities. He also has a good sense of pacing and story-structure, which David Lynch so conspicuously lacks.

All the actors are consistently good, to the point

that the Russian cosmonauts, little more than names in the novel, become memorable. The characterizations are not deep, but they are there, and it makes all the difference. Once completely believable characters have been established in a believable setting (Hyams' spaceship interiors are functional; they look real rather than artistically designed), the sudden intrusion of the fantastic, in the form of the "ghost" of David Bowman (Keir Dullea wearing the same red spacesuit we saw in 2001), becomes genuinely eerie. This is a more powerful effect than Lynch was able to get to with all his fancy sets, costuming and makeup.

I don't mean to imply that **2001** is a visually drab movie, though. The close-ups of Jupiter and its moons look just like those wondrous Voyager photos. (Some of them may well be those wondrous Voyager shots.) Of course this makes **2001** inconsistent with **2001**, in that Jupiter has a ring now and much more visible cloud formations. The moons don't conveniently line up either. But it is again the realism that makes the fantastic acceptable. In the end, when billions of monoliths "eat" the planet, the result looks like a real astronomical phenomenon.

I was impressed by the level of scientific accuracy in this film. There are some errors (including a big one I'll get to later). Sometimes the director forgot the characters were supposed to be weightless. But this is perhaps the first film since **Destination Moon** to attempt strict scientific accuracy. Space is not merely a backdrop in **2001**. Hyams actually makes use of the unique possibilities, particularly in a harrowing scene in which two men must rendezvous with the tumbling Discovery. One detail particularly pleased me; when, after all that terrifying vertigo, the Russian and American finally enter the Discovery's pod bay, they are walking on the wall. Why? Because the ship is tumbling end over end, thus forward becomes down. This is obvious to you and me, but it is unusual that anyone in a movie would think these things through properly.

The major mistake is at the end. I am tempted to run a contest to see how many can spot it, but I won't. At the end of the movie, Jupiter gets turned into a star to warm up Europa, so that there are now two stars in Earth's vicinity. Heywood Floyd (Roy Scheider) is heard in voice-over, writing to his small son on Earth, saying something like "the children of the new sun will never know a dark night." But, as we all know, the Earth is not always between the Sun and Jupiter! But you don't have to even know that to catch this mistake, because as we hear that very same voice-over, there are shots of the two suns over various famous landmarks, and in every one of them **both suns are setting**. It looks to me like the Children of the New Sun were about to experience the darkness in about half an hour. I rechecked the novel, and Clarke, of course, does not make this mistake.

A lot of non-SF people, particularly mainstream movie critics who have not read the novel, have trouble understanding the movie's ending. The movie, as well as the novel, ends with the alien monoliths (it is suggested that the aliens are the monoliths; outside of their machines, they have no form) to foster life on Europa, even as they did on Earth eons ago, and have made Europa the only place in the Solar system that is off limits to humans. David Bowman has been changed into a super-being, for use by the aliens as a kind of envoy (or maybe gardener). He is united with Hal, who has been forgiven. It is a somewhat weak ending, in that it negates most of the possibilities raised by **2001**: there will be no sudden leap in human evolution. Aside from two suns in the sky, and humanity being aware that they are not alone in the universe, life will go on as before. Presumably, the aliens would have warmed up Europa when the time was ripe, even if humanity had never found out, even if none of the events of the two novels/films had taken place.

This is a lingering problem created by Arthur Clarke; Peter Hyams just filmed what Clarke had written. He has

taken a flat novel and turned it into a vivid, memorable screen drama. **2010** is my clear choice for this year's Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation.

**Short subjects:** John Carpenter's **Starman** is worth seeing. It is everything you could want from a B-movie, well photographed and acted, with an acceptable plot. There will be no problem with the audience misunderstanding this one: an alien lands on Earth, and clones himself a human body from the hair of a dead man. The dead man's widow (Karen Allen, who kept the hair in her scrapbook) finds herself in a situation that is first frightening, then heartwarming, as she must drive the alien from Wisconsin to Arizona, where he is to be picked up; if he misses his pick-up, he dies. It's all very derivative of Steven Spielberg, right down to the climax at a famous landmark of the Southwest (Winslow Crater), but it is an acceptable film -- sentimental, humorous on an obvious level, and almost motionless in spots. There are no major lapses in logic. Jeff Bridges puts in a good performance as the puzzled alien, inside an unfamiliar body in an unfamiliar environment. Forget about the science: this alien came in answer to the invitation sent by the Voyager probe, but the film is sent in the present, and the Voyager probe hasn't exactly gotten far yet. However, someone knew what cloning is. The alien's body is created as a baby and has to have its growth accelerated. The widow notices that this body has a straight nose, where her husband's had been broken.

John Carpenter may someday make a major movie. He began in the neo-vomit school of horror directors. He finally learned **story** when he made **Christine**. Now he has learned to get by without shock effects. Like his colleague David Cronenberg (see my review of **Deadzone** last issue), he has progressed to the quality level of made-for-TV movies.

**Starman** may not be great science fiction, but it doesn't insult the intelligence. It is a good movie to which to take a non-sf fan date.

A word about **Gremlins**, or **If Sam Peckinpah Had Made The Three Stooges**. I didn't manage to review **Gremlins** in my last column, and Harlan Ellison has pre-empted much of what I had to say in his column in a recent issue of **FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION**. The film is, of course, a technical marvel, but there are so many technical marvels anymore that I am not impressed. It has some neat moments, but **Gremlins** is brutal and callous to its mean-spirited core. It isn't necessary for me to go into the logic lapses, or the dumb characterizations (such as the hero, age 21-going-on-13, lives in an attic filled with toys, takes his dog to his job at the bank, and is generally what his more mature contemporaries would call a **real dork**), but I did want to mention one particular instance of violence that disturbed me.

There's a nasty old woman in the film whom I can only regard as The Margaret Hamilton Character. She is hissably bad -- I mean she even threatens the dork's dog. (I'm fairly certain that the hero's name wasn't Dorothy, but could be wrong.) When the gremlins get loose and begin their malicious pranks, they sabotage the mechanical chair that carries the old lady upstairs in her mansion. It goes **real fast** and sends her through the roof. When she is killed, the audience laughs.

Now in a Three Stooges flick, such a nasty, stuck-up character would get a proper come-uppance, a pie in the face. In a Marx Brothers film (in which she would be played by Margaret Dumont), it would be something more imaginative. In **Gremlins**, she is gleefully **killed**.

There was a harrowing scene in the novel **I, Claudius** which didn't get into the television mini-series. With a sudden stroke, a gladiator chops off an opponent's arm at the shoulder. While the man is still in shock, the gladiator chops the **other** arm off, so the victim spend his last moments staggering around the arena, armless, spewing blood everywhere. The crowd loves it, and breaks into hysterical

laughter.

Things like that really happened. Dwarves were sent to fight old women. Animals were trained to rape maidens. And today, Steven Spielberg realizes that there is still an audience for that sort of thing.

-- Darrell Schweitzer

## FARMER cont. from page 14

much derivative and cult stuff. How the hell can people be writing all this derivative stuff and selling it? It's too much. You go into a bookstore and there's row on row of this stuff. Including the King stuff." What it boils down to, as always, is that the reader will get lots of what the current market demands.

In many ways, Phil Farmer is a classic science fiction writer. One of his primary concerns with the state of his art is the growing tendency toward what might be called sloppy thinking. A basic Farmer concern is the craftsmanship of writing fantasy; even though fantasy may appear to have no bounds, good fantasy is, in fact, a rigid extrapolation from predetermined premises. To deviate from these premises is to both weaken the work and cheat the reader, and exposes the writer as being something less than competent in his or her craft.

Farmer is disturbed in his observations of more and more of this sloppy thinking. There are exceptions, of course, such as the stories and books by Robert Silverberg, but then, "He's of the old school."

Farmer sees a number of reasons for this. First, much current story presentation is through the media of TV and movies, instead of the printed word. In the graphic media, the story is prepared by script writers who, Farmer and others feel, don't for the most part understand SF. Contributing to this is the increasing trend for directors to depend on spacial effects, visual effects and other sensational material to hold the viewer's attention. Setting, characterization and plot become secondary.

It may be even more basic than that, Farmer guesses. Those who are intelligent and mentally disciplined enough to think logically have always been a small percentage of the whole. The sloppy thinkers have always been the vast majority, and as the numbers have grown larger, the percentage has remained the same, but it seems far more noticeable than it once was.

Philip Jose Farmer, like most great writers, has always had a deep concern for those trying to follow in his calling. To them he says, "Read a lot, read everything. The SF writer has to know about both the past and present of science fiction."

There's a tendency to think of beginning writers as being young, but even retirees can aspire to becoming writers if they have the ability to discipline their thinking. Farmer feels that for the older, it boils down to "a flexible mind and unimpeded imagination." Both young and old would be writers must read, read, and read. They should be aware of their world and what's in it, but not depend on journalism. If you look at newspapers, much of the information you'll get will be sketchy at best, and downright misinformation at worst. Learn, read, study, train your mind.

Few if any SF fans question Philip Jose Farmer's status as one of the true masters of the science fiction and fantasy field. Those readers who have not yet gotten around to reading all of Farmer's vast literary output have a lot of good reading to which to look forward.

--E. E. Gilpatrick

# INTERVIEW: Alexis Gilliland



by Priscilla Lowell

Alexis Gilliland: even his name suggests intellect, astuteness and calm. The surprise is that all those attributes are there in Alexis Gilliland, along with a sprinkling of wit. He is well known as an SF fan, as well as SF author and cartoonist/satirist, having helped found the Washington Science Fiction Association (WSFA), and he still hosts many of the group's overflow meeting crowds at his comfortable Virginia home.

Gilliland is the creator of the popular *Rosinante* series, as well as his highly popular cartoons, some of which are collected in *The Iron Law of Bureaucracy*. He has, in fact, been best known for many years for his fan-nish cartoons which have appeared in hundreds of fanzines over the years. Gilliland's latest SF novel is *The End of the Empire*, his first non-*Rosinante* SF novel, and another book of cartoons is in the works.

Alexis' wife Dolly is very much a part of her husband's life in science fiction and otherwise. Both are loved and admired by Washington, D.C.-area SF fans. His fan writing has included satirical operetta entitled *2001: A Space Opera*, performed at a recent SF Worldcon, with Dolly as musical director and piano accompanist.

A man of many talents, Alexis Gilliland doesn't see them end at the tip of a pen. His chess expertise encom-

passes directing tournaments, and once playing at the "expert" level. It is also rumored that he makes a superb glass of homemade beer.

Mr. Gilliland has also won his share of awards for his various talents and work. He won the John W. Campbell Award as the best new SF writer in 1982, and he has been nominated for the Best Fan Artist Hugo Award seven times, winning it the last two years. It is clear that SF fans appreciate both his writing and cartooning skills.

Relaxed at his home, the author sat for the interview with his stunning blue-point Siamese cat "Warrick" (Duke) sauntering around the room, interspersing feline comments throughout the discussion.

**Thrust:** You are both a writer and an artist. Which gives you the most satisfaction?

**Gilliland:** They give different satisfaction. The art, the cartoons are very close to being conversational. You are looking for the immediate context; the twist, the flash, the surface. Whereas with writing, I spend an awful lot of time thinking. Where have I been? What am I doing? You are engaged in a much more reflective thing.

**Thrust:** There would seem to be so much more to your cartoons than just the artwork, the captions, the observations of the moment.

**Gilliland:** Take the queen and the magic mirror, for example. I've been drawing her for years. The queen is always a good-looking lady. Recently I drew her ugly and I didn't have any idea what the caption should be. Then looking at the cartoon later, I got an idea. But sometimes I have the idea for the caption first and the cartoon comes later on. The art and the words are intertwined.

**Thrust:** Does any of this transpose over to writing?

**Gilliland:** When you are writing for publication, for instance, the title is something that the editor may select. For my latest novel, I had the working title *Colonel Karff's War*. But the editor said they had another book with "war" in the title soon to be released, so the editor chose *The Empire* to be the title of the book. [The book was actually released by Del Rey as *The End of the Empire*.]

**Thrust:** What advice would you give to a new writer?

**Gilliland:** It would depend on how young they are. If they are in High School, for example, I'd suggest that they take typing and learn to type. They should also learn grammar and punctuation while in school, since they are the basic tools you work with, the tools of the trade. If it was someone older who has just decided that he or she would like to write, I'd say that assuming that you have the tools, what you have to do is to sit down and keep at it. That means you have to find your way of writing. Some people are morning writers. Joe Haldeman gets up at 4:30 in the morning and Gayle, his wife, sleeps late; when she gets up at 9:00 or 10:00, he has already put in his stint of writing for the day. I'm an evening writer; when I write, it's usually after dinner at 7:00 or 8:00 in the evening, and I go from there.

**Thrust:** Is there any other special *modus operandi* for you in terms of your writing ritual?

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- The Pirates of Rosinante* (Del Rey Books, 1982)
- The End Of The Empire* (Del Rey Books, 1983)



**Gilliland:** You mean are there any secrets? Where do I get the crazy ideas? You establish a kind of habit. You start going and you establish a kind of pattern. You start going along your habit pattern and your body responds. The habit helps get you going. I find that when I'm going on a novel, when I've gotten started... but getting started is the hardest part. It was different with each novel, how the novel got started. It usually went slowly for me, then at some point pick up and start moving fast. There's a kind of natural rhythm; I don't force it. I can tell when my writing is going badly, because I don't want to write it. But if I think about it enough, I eventually figure out what is wrong.

**Thrust:** So you would leave it for a while, and then come back to it?

**Gilliland:** Yes, and then go back and rewrite a chapter or two. In my first novel, the whole thing took a nosedive at 50,000 words. It just stopped. I couldn't figure it out until I went back and made some changes. It was like someone was acting in a logical manner when he should have been acting in a heroic manner.

**Thrust:** Have you ever run out of ideas while writing?

**Gilliland:** No... I have lots of ideas. The problem is finding interesting ones. With a novel, you want to get from the beginning to the end, and you want to do so in an interesting manner. It is somewhat like playing chess. Each move is a slightly different situation, and has its own interesting weights and balances. As a writer, I try to sustain my own interest, and presume that if I am interested in what I'm writing, then the reader will also be interested. Of course, there are many different values you can bring to writing. You can bring a sense of emotion. You can emphasize the word play, the prose itself, the story, the action, the plot. All of these elements must be there, but can be given different weights. It's like shuffling cards and dealing bridge hands...

**Thrust:** What writers most influenced you?

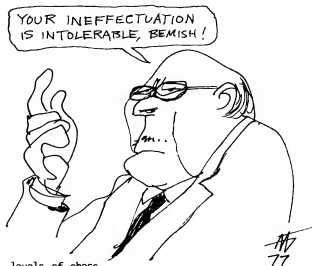
**Gilliland:** Rudyard Kipling for a couple of years, when I was twelve or thirteen I wouldn't read anything but Kipling, over and over again. I discovered at the library that Kipling wrote a lot of strange stuff. He wrote an enormous range of material. A lot wasn't suitable for a boy that age, but a lot was. Heinlein and Asimov are among the SF novelists who had a great influence on me. Among the newer writers, there's Williams, and Somtow Sucharitkul, the Campbell Award winner for last year. Connie Willis is good; I understand that she started by writing confession fiction. Writing romance fiction is very similar to writing SF; you are writing sentences and putting them into paragraphs, and if you can write a good sentence and then another, you have the battle half licked.

**Thrust:** A literate sentence then?

**Gilliland:** Well... it's the business of basic mechanics. Winston Churchill said that they kept him in the 4th form until he could write a decent sentence. It took him four years. [laughter] But when he finally got through, he was the master...

**Thrust:** The British school system...

**Gilliland:** Or anybody's school system. They are trying to get you to fit into the world you are going to live in. The problem they are having right now is that it isn't that clear at the moment what that world is or will be; things are changing so rapidly. The world today would be very difficult to imagine from the world of 30 years ago. In 1954, they were discussing whether a machine would ever be able to play chess. I knew some people at Purdue University at that time who thought it would never happen, because the machines at that time were unreliable, large and expensive. Now the question is just how much do you want to spend to play what level of chess. I have a little machine here which plays six



levels of chess.

**Thrust:** Are Americans becoming more interested in chess?

**Gilliland:** If some millionaire or some oil company decided to spend lots of money so chess players would make as much as basketball players, you would see a lot of interest in chess. But chess is an intellectual vocation, and Americans don't trust the intellect to provide them with vocations. They want something more physical. A slam dunk is much easier to show on TV than a knight fork. Your good chess moves and your bad chess moves all look the same. It's not necessarily bad, it's just the bias of our culture.

**Thrust:** Where do you think America will be in terms of the world community in the next thirty years?

**Gilliland:** America today is not like what it was 30 years ago, or 60 years ago. It's not just that we fought World War II and had the great depression in the last 60 years.

**Thrust:** Will there be Rosinantes?

**Gilliland:** I suspect that by then there will be space colonies and people will be moving into space. I would like to see that.

**Thrust:** Would you like to be part of that movement out there?

**Gilliland:** I don't know; maybe if I can take the bus. [laughter] I don't know whether I would, but my son Charles, maybe he would. Besides, in 30 years, I'm not going to be going anywhere.

**Thrust:** You might.

**Gilliland:** I don't know. There are a lot of problems right here on Earth that I don't think can be solved for a while. It's easy to become alarmed looking into the future. You don't have to have a nuclear war, there's biological warfare. Your chemical poisons are very deadly. There are all sorts of weapons with no battlefield experience to draw from regarding their use. This may be a good thing; your generals on both sides have to have some serious doubts. Would you want to go to war with this thing, it's a second generation un-tested weapon. It was Pentagon pressure as much as anything else that forced the moving of the Marines out of Lebanon, for instance. Reality catches up with you even if you are the President of the United States.

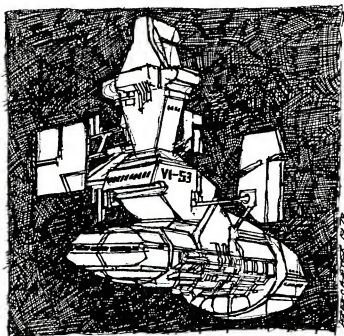
**Thrust:** Would you talk a little about your cartoons?

**Gilliland:** I've sold cartoons, but I primarily send them out to fanzines. One of the reasons one wins awards is that people recognize the person's name, and the reason they recognize the name is the person's longevity. After you've been around for a while, people keep remembering you and it feeds on itself. You can argue about talent. My cartoons are ideas expressed with the minimum effort of drawing, as opposed to spending more

..... Cont. on page 32

# REVIEWS —

## — books, etc.



**AGE OF WONDERS: EXPLORING THE WORLD OF SCIENCE FICTION** by David Hartwell (Walker and Company, 1984, 205 pp., \$15.95)

The past decade or so has seen a surprising number of non-fiction works on science fiction which have been invaluable in establishing an accurate record of the history and development of the science fiction field, as well as intelligent assessments of that history, for the benefit of both insiders and those outside the SF field. Included in this list of works are the highly subjective histories in the form of autobiographical works by such authors as Pohl, del Rey, Asimov and Williamson, as well as the factual fanish histories by Harry Warner, Jr. To the short list of truly valuable books about science fiction must now be added David Hartwell's *Age of Wonders*.

Hartwell's book, unlike most books written by important insiders in the SF field, is clearly aimed at an audience who knows little or nothing about the science fiction field. It is a series of connected essays which use selected details of SF history in attempting to explain the phenomenon of SF—both the literature and the community which surrounds it—to those who have little or no direct knowledge of science fiction or SF fandom.

David Hartwell is a professional in the SF and fantasy field whose name is a household word to every science fiction fan, but virtually unknown to the vast mass of SF readers. In one way, Hartwell is the perfect person to have written this book. He has been a highly intelligent player in the game of SF for many years, but has maintained the ability to be a detached observer of the field. The observations, opinions and explanations of this book are eminently reasonable.

It would be easy to cavil about this book, however, and dismiss it as of no great importance, because of this

very reasonableness. There are few brilliant and original insights in this book, nor any particularly controversial opinions. There is little in this book which can be seen as startlingly new to anyone who has been involved in the SF field for more than a decade or two. In a way, what Hartwell has done is to take what we all know and write it out in a clear and understandable way for those who do not know what SF is all about.

The reason why that this is an important book—arguably one of the most important books about the field ever written—is that Hartwell has completed this task so flawlessly. The key question in my mind is: Will it reach its intended audience? Are there thousands out there who would like to know the meaning of the science fiction/fantasy (speculative fiction?) phenomenon, and will use this book to find out? It is my guess that, unfortunately, there are not.

But even if not, this book should serve a valuable purpose within the field in providing an acceptable consensus within the SF field regarding the significance of SF literature, and what it is that we are all up to here in the world of SF fandom.

— Doug Fratz

**THE TALISMAN** by Stephen King and Peter Straub (Viking, 1984, 645 pp., \$18.95)

Ever wonder what it would be like if *The Lord of the Rings* had been set in contemporary middle-class America, with an epic quest across a landscape of shopping malls, hamburger stands, and bars? Well, thanks to Stephen King and Peter Straub, now we know.

King and Straub have gone to the core of the epic fantasy. They realize that the imaginary world/Dreaming Mode actually presents us with a distorted version of our own place and time. So, with the bluntness characteristic of King at least, they have given us a parallel worlds story in which the "real" world and the fantasy-land/mock-medieval "Territories" directly relate to and reflect one another. After a while, the two so interpenetrate that it becomes useless for the reader (or the characters) to try to keep them apart. It all works. King and Straub are both masters of characterization, and they tell a vivid, exciting story populated by real people you are not likely to forget. (Not to mention the unreal people: the loveable werewolf named, inevitably, Wolf, is one of the most engaging characters in modern fantasy.)

The plot is roughly this: twelve-year-old Jack Sawyer, son of a washed-up B-movie queen, must travel through both contemporary America and the magical Territories in search of the Talisman which can save his dying mother. He is opposed by his evil "uncle" (his dead father's business partner) who is a powerful magician in the Territories, and no mean conjurer in this world either. The uncle's minions include not-so-lavable werewolves and even a Jim Jones-like crazed fundamentalist preacher who runs a prison for wayward boys. Dangers encountered along the way range from carnivorous trees to Dickensian horrors. In the territories, Jack's mother really is a queen, and he is a lost prince returned from the dead (his Territories "twin" having been murdered in infancy), a kind of messiah.

It sounds hokey, but there is a genuine mythic grandeur to it all. Passages will remind you of the best of Tolkien: the grim parts, the Mines of Moria and the first sight of Mount Doom. There are even deliberate allusions to Narnia. But there is an important difference: the element of *comfort* is gone. This epic quest is a grueling, nasty, ugly affair, on which the hero would really rather not have gone. At times, because the characters are so real and you are so involved with them, you almost don't want to go on either, out of dread at what will happen to them. But their triumphs are real too, and the book gives a rare sense of uplift.

Of course, toward the end, it is clear that everything will be all right. The most involving part of the novel is the middle two-thirds. There is a slow start, and the last few menaces toward the end seem made of straw.

This is a very good book. It is intelligently conceived, well written, as gripping as any work of fiction can be, but I must stop short of claiming it to be great fantasy. It may even become a classic, in the sense of *Dracula* or *She*, but it will never be thought a Great Book in the sense of Tolkien or Lewis. There is no moral urgency. *The Talisman* doesn't actually say anything, beyond the obvious (cruelty and treachery are bad, kindness and loyalty are good); all that writing skill and insight into psychological resonances are employed simply to tell a good story. Are King and Straub to be faulted for this? No. Not every writer knows the meaning of life, or whatever, and many who think they do merely become tiresome.

It is a superb story, no more, no less.

- Darrell Schweitzer

**EMERGENCE** by David R. Palmer (Bantam Books, 1984, 291 pp., \$2.95) (ISBN 0-553-24501-5)

To say that this David R. Palmer novel, his first, is "reminiscent of the best of Heinlein," as Heinleinophile Spider Robinson is quoted saying on the cover of this novel, is the understatement of the year. Because the truth is, Palmer has managed to pull off the seemingly impossible task of out-Heinlein-ing Heinlein. He has written a novel whose background world, characters and events all work together to support the Heinleinian view of human reality, and do it **better** than any of Heinlein's own books.

And in addition to its uncompromising support for the Heinleinian elitist world-view, in fact in spite of it, Palmer manages to produce a very good science fiction novel, approaching the level of *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, and superior to any recent Heinlein, even the moderately successful *Friday*. In other words, *Emergence* is a novel every bit as good as Heinlein's best adult SF novels.

The protagonist is an adolescent female super-genius, and in fact a member of a recently-mutated, true-breeding, superior-in-every-way human species—**homo post hominem**. The scene is the near future, just after an interesting combination of nuclear and biological warfare have served to kill every last human being on Earth, **except** those disease-resistant **post hominem**. The plot: the young protagonist must stay alive, and find all the other **post hominem**, most of whom were part of a secret project, knew each other before the war and have gone somewhere to meet. In looking for this organized group, she comes upon other **post hominem** survivors, most good and friendly, some not as good (in the case of one she has to kill because he was going to kill her pet bird). In the end, all the good American **post hominem** must prevent the threat of the Russian **post hominem**, who are (of course) evil.

In this simplistic description, this plot may seem rather unlikely to make to gripping, believable story. But it is with single-minded intensity and sheer strength of vision that Palmer pulls it off. This is a compelling novel. Having the protagonist be a thirteen-year-old girl is effective and strangely believable. For those who have a secret wish to be part of an ultra-competent-but-mostly-nonbelligerent elite (and I think quite a few SF readers fall into this category), this will be a book that is hard to put down. Of recent novels, only Fred Pohl's overlooked 1982 novel *Starburst* can compare with *Emergence* for strength of elitist vision, although Pohl's book had more of a sense of humor about its elitist precepts.

I expect this book to have a good chance at a Hugo nomination, and could even have a chance to win. When a

new author out-Heinleins Heinlein, people take notice.

- Doug Fratz

**JOB: A COMEDY OF JUSTICE** by Robert Heinlein (Ballantine, 1984, 376 pp., \$16.95)

It is the Heinlein of the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s that most SF fans think of when they talk about the classics of the field. His later books have tended to be long-winded, ponderous, boring, and espousing a political philosophy that makes Ronald Reagan look like a dangerous leftist-wing radical. *The Number of the Beast* showed some of the old Heinlein promise, but was not well received by SF fans, possibly because it satirized the SF world. His subsequent novel, *Friday*, got better reception from SF fans.

Despite this, Heinlein remains a best-selling author. The big question is whether all this fame is being earned, or whether this Grand Old Man of the Spaceways is living on past reputation and glories. Two of Heinlein's contemporaries, Clifford Simak and Jack Williamson, are more prolific, but have failed to get the recognition they deserve, at least in terms of financial success.

I am pleased to report that in the case of *Job: A Comedy of Justice*, the advance notices are justified by this book's peculiar mix of alternate world novel and theological satire.

Alexander Hergensheimer is conned into taking a fire-walk while on vacation in Polynesia. A member of a fundamentalist church, he figures his faith and commitment will allow him to perform the feat. But when he reaches the other side of the firewalk pit, he is in a totally different world. The natives are now naked above the waist instead of clothed. The liner he arrived in is now powered by steam. And people call him Alec Graham, so he assumes this new role while he tries to determine where he is and how to get back. The person he has replaced has apparently traded places and gone to Hergensheimer's puritanical world. Although he constantly expects the real Graham to return, he still manages to fall in love with Margrethe, an attractive blonde who is a stewardess on the ship. Things go downhill, as our hero finds Graham was involved in shady dealings, and almost gets killed over a million dollars Graham has stashed away. After an iceberg (in the tropics!) has sunk the ship, Alexander is plunged into yet another world, along with Margrethe. Alex is forced to work as a dishwasher in Mexico, having no passport or papers. But he soon switches universes again, after a double earthquake. Alex and Margrethe frantically struggle to adjust to each new world, while the suspicion grows that something really BIG is behind it all.

They plan to get back to Kansas, and they nearly make it. Enroute, our hero is forced to rethink a lot of his hitherto rigid attitudes. In Texas, they have dinner with a family of witches headed by one Jerry Farnsworth (sound familiar?). Finally Alex is caught up in the END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT, and goes to the prototypical Christian hereafter where he must cope with a heavenly bureaucracy and locate Margrethe again—she doesn't belong, having something of a Norse religion. He finds he is now Saint Alexander, with halo and all the other perks. He decides to go to the Other Place to look for Margrethe. The Devil grants him audience and offers him a job as a bible thumping evangelist (to replace Pope Alexander VI, the current incumbent). Since she isn't in Hell, he must confront God himself, who resembles the head of General Motors. Our hero eventually gets what he wants, and everyone lives happily ever after.

The book's light, humorous tone makes this the best Heinlein book for a long time. It is a hybrid book, and doesn't always work perfectly, but most messages are at least somewhat hidden. The scenes in the hereafter are reminiscent of Mark Twain's "Captain Stormfield's Visit to

Heaven."

I was pleased to see the dedication was to old colleague Clifford Simak. If Heinlein continues in this vein, his next novel should be a real corker.

- W. Ritchie Benedict

**ALIEN STARS**, edited by Elizabeth Mitchell (Baen Books, 1985, 254 pp., \$2.95)

This is billed as a new collection of "three short novels of future war," and is basically a "mouse" anthology from Baen Books, similar to the *Berkley Showcase* series of a few years back. These books seldom get much critical notice, and seem to be considered suspect from the beginning--what are publishers' book editors doing editing anthologies?

But *Alien Stars* is a pleasant surprise. The volume does indeed contain three novellas (although only the first is actually about a future war in any real sense of the word): "The Scapegoat" by C. J. Cherryh; "Seasons" by Joe Haldeman; and "Gordon Solitaire" by Timothy Zahn. The pleasant surprise is that the Cherryh and Haldeman stories are Hugo Award-quality stories.

"The Scapegoat" is an utterly brilliantly written story of a future war between humans and aliens of slightly **lower** technological capabilities, who have nevertheless held out for many years out of sheer tenacity, and have never communicated with their human foes. Cherryh first introduces the human view of the war now being fought exclusively on the alien's devastated home planet. Then the first emissary is sent from the aliens to communicate to the humans, and little by little the alien's view of the war is revealed. The development of understanding and friendship between the human and the alien emissary, and what they must do to end the war to the satisfaction of the alien culture, is something you will long remember. This is a powerful, moving story. (The only problem is the title, which I believe misuses the term vis a vis the story--there must be one hundred better titles for this story! Like "The Emissary" maybe...)

Haldeman's story is of similar calibre, but of a very different type. "Seasons" is the story of an ill-fated long-term xenological expedition to a planet whose sole intelligent species consists of large, simian creatures of an apparent stone-age culture. The story is told entirely in first person by several members of the study team, who record what is happening to them by talking into an artificial tooth which is actually a recorder. The purpose of the study was to meet the species without interfering with their culture through introduction of advanced technology. The evolving, if fragmented, story of how the mission slowly turned into a nightmare is indeed compelling and very difficult to put down until it's through. The only small flaw is that Haldeman chose to add a flip, ironic finale which was both unneeded and an apparent cheap shot at his perceived inability of heartless bureaucrats to view things in human terms.

The final, and longest, novella in the anthology is Timothy Zahn's "Gordon Solitaire." It is a decently written and somewhat interesting ANALOG puzzle story, but lacks the emotional power of the first two novellas in the book. It is about another small team of xenologists and other scientists on an alien planet, but this time the alien is a small monkey-like creature who may be pre-sentient. But then one of the aliens fires on the humans with a high-tech needle gun. Puzzle: how does a primitive species get and use a high-tech weapon when they barely use tools, and how can the humans figure it out before they all get killed? Although the explanation is clever, the characters and events in this long, drawn out story do not always make perfect sense.

But the Cherryh and Haldeman stories are more than

worth the price of this book. Baen Books editor Elizabeth Mitchell is to be commended for coming up with these two stories for this triple-feature anthology.

- Doug Fratz

**SLEEPLESS NIGHTS IN THE PROCRUSTEAN BED** by Harlan Ellison, Edited by Marty Clark (Borgo Press, 1994, 192 pp., \$7.95[paper], \$14.95[cloth], \$30.00[limited edition])

If Harlan Ellison hadn't become a writer, he could have been a rabble-rouser **par excellence**, or the last word in bring-down-the-roof, Bible-thumping preachers. The man is both eloquent and **persuasive**. I have seen and heard him almost go as far as calling his audience a bunch of ignorant morons and get a standing ovation for it. I'm not sure if he makes his listeners think as much as he simply makes

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them lap it up, whatever it happens to be at the moment.

And Harlan writes essays the same way. Some of the pieces in this collection are Ellison speeches (including his celebrated resignation from SFWA), and the others have the same effects as Ellison speeches. They hold your attention in a similar way that a herd of crazed elephants spaming down an alley towards you does.

Some of the topics are science-fictional, but most are not. There's first-hand reporting of the 1965 Freedom March on Montgomery, Alabama; a piece on the positive aspects of a video cassette dating service; a very negative one on video games; much about Hollywood, writing, and Harlan Ellison; and a very vivid profile of Steve McQueen.

A book like this presumes some prior interest in the author, and since there is a large audience for anything Ellison does, I need only point out to his fans that this book exists, and has articles gathered from sufficiently diverse sources that you probably have not seen them all.

[A note to collectors: The hardcover editions of this book are going to be very valuable someday soon. The Borgo hardcovers I've seen have all been variant bindings rather than true separate editions, but that should only make them more scarce. Virtually all will go to libraries and not show up in stores or get remaindered. Once Borgo goes out-of-print, they'll be impossible to find for crazed Ellison collectors.]

- Darrell Schweitzer

THE ARMAGEDDON RAG by George R. R. Martin (Pocket Books, 1985, 399 pp., \$3.95) (ISBN 0-671-53253-7)

For those who did not buy and read George R. R. Martin's *The Armageddon Rag* in 1983, when it was the year's

best contemporary fantasy novel, rejoice: Pocket has finally issued it in paperback. If you are between the ages of 40 and 45, and have even vague memories of the counter-culture of the late sixties and early seventies, I think you will find in this book some of the essence of that era.

The protagonist of Martin's book is a former editor and writer for a rock newspaper (a la ROLLING STONE) turned struggling novelist. Bugged down on his latest novel, he is offered a free-lance assignment by his old newspaper to investigate the murder of one of the major rock promoters of the sixties, who was also the agent of the quintessential sixties rock group, Nazgul. He accepts the job out of nostalgic fascination, and uses the opportunity to investigate the counter-culture of which he was once a part, and the reasons for its ending, which seemed to coincide with the on-stage sniper killing of the lead singer of the Nazgul. In the rebirth of the Nazgul, Martin effectively uses the sole fantasy element of the book, in the form of the person who causes the resurrection, through demonic means, of the group's lead singer, and thereby begins the resurrection of the spirit and culture of the sixties rock counter-culture.

This book does not really attempt to explain the rock counter-culture of the sixties, but rather it requires some amount of knowledge of that era to appreciate fully the events of the book. A knowledge of the sixties is therefore a prerequisite to appreciating the book, rather than something to be gained from its perusal.

But if you have even a hint of nostalgia for that era in our modern culture, and can enjoy a good contemporary fantasy-mystery, *The Armageddon Rag* is a book you will most certainly not want to miss reading.

- Doug Fratz

THE BUSINESS MAN: A TALE OF TERROR (Harper & Row, 1984, 292 pp., \$14.50)

Negative commentary on fantastic fiction, or "escape literature," often makes the same general point: the characters' motivational history is diminished in proportion to the unreality of the present, future or past the writer invents for them. There is obviously some truth to this criticism. The logic of fantastic fiction often is more rigid than that for realistic fiction. Like interest accrued on a huge loan, the more logical withdrawal from realism there is, the greater burden of logical interest that will build. An experienced reader will have encountered the full range of different outlooks which serve to define the logical system for any given story in the fantastic genre: the cheaply optimistic (*Voyage of the Space Beagle*); the alarmingly pessimistic (*I Am Legend*); bleak Nietzschean affirmations (*Bug Jack Barron*, the movie *Alien*, *The Mind Parasites*). In addition, some fine books actually escape the genre; many of these are horror-stories, such as Jackson's *"The Lottery"* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, DuMaurier's *The Birds*, and this new book by Thomas Disch.

As a fanciest, Disch possesses grace; and his gift is not so narrow that it has limited itself to one genre. *The Businessman* is a completely committed horror-story, possibly Disch's first, and much of what made his SF work successful reappears here, as well as the most successful conventions of the genre: a corpse resurrected, a murderer haunted, violence, demonism, and retributive justice that follows a typically logical New England Gothic pattern of fixed rules and regulation. The plot is interesting: Robert Glandier, businessman in his early forties, murders Giselle, his pretty and much younger wife. The book opens with Giselle's first stirrings in her grave, spurred by the meshing of natural destiny and the divine plan. Her mother, Joy Ann, drops dead as Giselle reappears outside the grave, then aids her daughter in the retributive project, with additional help of the ghost of John Berryman.





Berryman's inclusions seems to have designs on the reader, but it is a clear portrait of the poet, and like Kinsella's depicting of Joe Jackson in *Shoeless Joe*, so moving and believable that it can only have been included as an act of love.

Disch is also a fine stylist: his books are never as narrow as the genre to which they limit themselves. This one is no exception. It contains many epigrammatic passages, because Disch is not shy about being a fine writer; he can also be funny without being dumb or cruel, a distinction that sets him apart from, say, the present master of the genre, Stephen King. Big swatches of Disch's prose ought to be set out as exhibits without tags to attract readers. My favorite passage in this book occurs near the end, when Gisselle, who has temporarily become a hamadryad, is quizzed by Berryman, who is temporarily a frog:

"He puffed out his cheeks complacently and blinked. 'I like being a frog. The skin fits. How about you? What's it like being inside a tree?'"

She closed her eyes and thought for a while before she answered. One of the advantages of a semi-vegetable existence was the different time scale. There was never any need to hurry.

"Sexy," she said at last. "It feels stupendously sexy."

This is not the hit-and-run writing of checkout-counter-style reading; this is a style that bears scrutiny. This is also a very sexy book. Genre fiction for decades sidestepped the erotic elements that, inescapable in horror stories and somewhat so in SF, underwent suppression when the genres were captured by the pulps and the movies. In the books of Lovecraft, for instance, there is a continuing transmutation of sexual desire along the lines of gigantism. Lovecraft's exaggerated spatio-temporal scale produced the Great Old Ones who, like love-starved Buddhas, seek a human significance to match their tremendously inhuman state. Perhaps a love of physical exaggeration is the surest sign of the presence of the moralist; in all events, the recognition of the body's positive allure--along with its tendency to decay and take the analytic faculties with it--is a note of maturity too long delayed.

Disch has written some of the strongest fiction published in this country in the past decade and a half. I am not alone in wondering why his books are often out of print, and overlooked. He wrote *The Genocides*, a masterpiece of form and brevity, in his mid-twenties; it is recently back in print, but still overlooked. Delaney called attention to 334 and *Camp Concentration* in his book of essays, *The Jewell-Hinged Jaw*, but both are difficult to obtain. Disch, like Philip Dick, seems headed for the sort of career that destines his best work to disappear from circulation.

- J. T. Barbarese

THE STEPS OF THE SUN by Walter Tevis (Berkley, 1985, 259 pp., \$2.95)

Walter Tevis began his professional writing career in 1959 with a book titled *The Hustler*, which became a movie starring Paul Newman and Jackie Gleason two years later. In 1963, Tevis published *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, which became a popular SF film in 1976. In 1980, Tevis did a wonderful SF novel titled *Mockingbird*. And before Walter Tevis died, he produced one last SF novel titled *The Steps of the Sun*. The hardcover was released by Doubleday in 1983; Berkley has just no released the paperback edition.

Tevis had a remarkable aptitude for humanizing science fiction. *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is really a novel about alcoholism and estrangement, though the protagonist is a visitor from another world. *Mockingbird* was a novel about love at the end of the world. And his last book, *The Steps of the Sun*, is a hopeful novel about, of all things, a New York real estate man. Tevis wrote well enough about the modern-day world, in *The Hustler* and his much more recent book, *The Queens Gambit*. But even when Tevis wrote SF with futuristic settings, he wrote about real people with real feelings and problems, who manage their lives as best they can, under circumstances beyond their control.

The New York of 2063 is a grim shadow of today's New York due to depleted energy resources, a new ice age, and China's growing world dominance. Ben Belson is a super-rich financier who wants to reverse the decline of his favorite city. The United States is becoming impotent, and Belson already is; much of the energy he directs toward successful money-making scams seems to be due to sexual frustration. He buys a beat-up old Chinese spaceship and travels to the star Fomalhaut to explore its known planets. There, he discovers a safe form of uranium, which will react without melt-down, and he brings it back to re-power New York. He also has a mystical experience while on the planet Belson, which he named after himself.

Some of the action in *The Steps of the Sun* comes from short story, "The Apotheosis of Myra," one of the stories in Tevis' short story collection, *Far From Home*. Tevis was no great stylist, but he knew how to tell a good story and keep readers interested. Tevis had the ability to create identifiable characters and situations, better than most SF writers. By the time of his death, Tevis was finally getting some notice within the science fiction field as an author to watch.

Like his earlier books, *The Steps of the Sun* can be highly recommended.

- David Pettus



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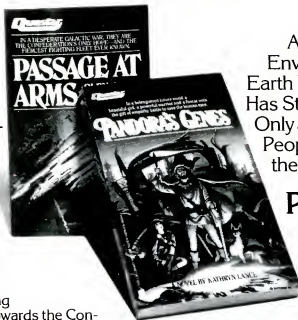
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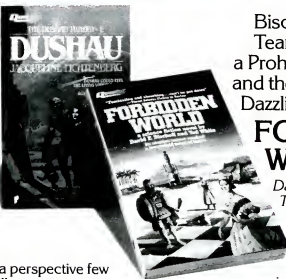
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# BOOKS OF NOTE

by Doug Fratz

**THE WILD SHORE** by Kim Stanley Robinson (Ace, 1984, 371pp., \$2.95). **ICEHENGE** by Kim Stanley Robinson (Ace, 1984, 262 pp., \$2.95). Rarely does a writer burst onto the SF scene with two novels in the same year of this high quality, and two very different novels at that. While *The Wild Shore* is a highly original after-the-war story, which uses a youthful protagonist to brilliant effect, *Icehenge* is high-tech hard science fiction, with mysterious intrigue and sense of wonder galore. While the latter reminds most of Benford, the former is more reminiscent of Mark Twain.

**NEURONANCER** by William Gibson (Ace, 1984, 271 pp., \$2.95). This is an utterly brilliant first novel, and the first SF novel to provide a fully realized and up-to-date portrayal of mind-computer interfacing. An intelligent treatment is given to some of the concepts which the movie *Tron* tried to use. This is hard SF with an ultra-modern feel.

**WORLD'S END** by Joan D. Vinge (Tor, 1984, 294 pp., \$2.95). Vinge's sequel to her much-lauded *The Snow Queen*, has unfortunately gotten too little notice, probably because this book is nowhere near as long. But this book is well worth reading. I was surprised to find, however, that although I remember enjoying *The Snow Queen*, I have no

## Gilliland (cont. from pg. 24)

effort drawing and making something pretty. I do most of my cartoons by sketching on a 3x5 slip of paper, filling in the details, and making sure the caption is legible. There is usually quite an economy of line in my drawing.

**Thrust:** Tell us about your latest novel from Del Rey.

**Gilliland:** It's actually a sword and sorcery novel, and therefore very different than my previous books. I may also have a new cartoon book coming out in the future. Michael Hoy, who published *The Iron Law of Bureaucracy*, may want to publish another one. I have to send some cartoons to him so he can make a selection.

**Thrust:** Do you work with pen and ink on your cartoons?

**Gilliland:** I use felt-tip pens, flair pens, ballpoint pens--they all give different lines. In the past I worked a lot with rapidograph, and that gave a different feeling. The illusion is caused by the shading, lots of fine lines, which gives a grey effect at a distance. But it's actually stroke, stroke, stroke--not very heavy.

**Thrust:** I understand that your hobby now is making beer.

**Gilliland:** In 1978, they made home brewing legal, and I saw an ad in the paper for a kit. A household with more than one adult is allowed to brew 200 gallons a year. That's a lot of beer. What I have is a 7-1/2 gallon Tupperware pot with a lid and a valve on it. I have to add water, malt, hops, certain salts...

**Thrust:** You have to be a scientist then...

**Gilliland:** Oh no, these things come in cans and packages and you rip it open and pour it in. [laughter] You have the fun of making it, and I think that it quite a bit better than commercial lagers which you get in this country. You use fresh ingredients and can make it to your own taste. I've also made Porter and Stout, which is quite close to the draft Guinness that I had when I was in England. Very full-bodied.

**Thrust:** Thank you very much, Alexis, and best of luck in all your endeavors, be they literary, artistic, or beer-related.

memory of the plot of that book, even after reading this sequel. Either *The Snow Queen* wasn't very memorable, or I'm getting old...

**BROKEN SYMMETRIES** by Paul Preuss (Pocket, 1984, 371 pp., \$3.95). With this book, Preuss joins the small cadre of first-rank hard SF writers, and demonstrates a Benfordesque ability to present realistic scientists at work. This book is a must for hard science fiction enthusiasts.

\*\*\*\*\*Cont. on page 34

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# Counter-Thrusts



## LETTERS

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Thrust Publications, 8217 Langport  
Terrace, Gaithersburg, Maryland  
20877.

Darrell Schweitzer  
113 Deepdale Road  
Strafford, PA 19087

THRUST #21 is a very impressive issue, and I am glad to have been a part of it. I hope you can keep up your big push. You're in a position to take over SFR's niche, since Geis has stopped paying for material. So with STARSHIP gone, you may have a

shot at a nomination for the semipro-zine Hugo.

Your Thrust Awards have outlived their usefulness, I think. I suspect the data mean very little. TWILIGHT ZONE is dropping in the poll, but does that mean it's getting better, or that people have stopped reading it? Likewise, AMAZING's win may mean that THRUST's readers have started to pick it up again. When AMAZING was at its worst, circa 1979, how many THRUST readers were aware of it? The other "most disappointing" categories contain the usual number of award nominees and major books. A poll of the best works would include many of the same items. So what does all this accomplish? (Everything is a function of circulation. Why doesn't Scithers get nominated for Hugos anymore, as you noted? Because AMAZING's circulation is too low.)

Ted White is groping around the problem of fantasy-preference being related to the ignorance of the readership. It's always been a fan prejudice that this is so. The fans of the 1930's were very defensive about SF, and to separate it from the main body of fantasy, they had to convince themselves that SF is superior. Even today we can run across the concept that SF that is sloppy enough becomes "mere" fantasy. Like Ted, I can't read most of the new generic fantasy that is being published. It isn't about anything. They go through the motions of telling a story based on fantasy trappings. Thanks to Lester del Rey, we now know exactly what a "fantasy novel" is, the way we know what a "Regency romance" is. But fantasy is a universal form, and will survive Del Rey Books, and in 20 years those look-alike books will not be remembered, while the best fantasies of our time, most published in the mainstream, will survive. Books like *The Wondering Unicorn* by Mujica-Lainez and *Grendel and Freddy's Book* by Gardner and *The Kingdoms of Elfin* by Warner. In the meantime, publishers have discovered that the lowest common denominator audience, who read "prose television," will accept fantasy trappings as readily as any other.

Does fantasy spread superstition? I doubt it. SF is more open to that charge. The big superstitions of the day--Bigfoot, UFO's, ESP, Atlantis, etc.--derive from SF. Considerably fewer people believe in faeries. Even the traditional superstitions like astrology, reincarnation, and witchcraft have taken on scientific gloss, usually including double-talk about "energy." Astrologers now claim to be scientific interpreters of cosmic forces, instead of interpreters of the wills of the

gods. SF has permeated our culture. All the NATIONAL ENQUIRER stuff is now science fictional: human mutants, apes giving birth to humans, UFO's, cloning. Modern superstition tries to assume the authority of science ("Scientists Prove There is Life After Death") and most of the imagery comes from science fiction. However, I don't think SF writers are at fault. Just as most people who believe in Voodoo, demonic possession, ghosts, etc. probably don't read much fantasy fiction (just fantasy "fact"), I doubt that many pseudoscience superstitious people read SF. Also, most great literary fanatics have been rationalists, like Lord Dunsany.

In regards to Dave Bischoff's letter, if *Last Dangerous Visions* is ever published, and I won't believe it until I see ads for it, I doubt it will call attention to the "more adventurous qualities of which the field is capable." No, it will be a museum. There used to be a joke in the mid-seventies that *Last Dangerous Visions* will be subtitled, "Great SF of the 1960's, and the 1980's." I think *Last Dangerous Visions* will be like what would have resulted if, say, a whole year's worth of GALAXY inventory from 1952 were suddenly unearthed and published. There would be stories by long-dead writers. Stories responding to trends that have since peaked and gone away. Early apprentice stories by writers now established and in mid-career. Stories by seemingly hot new talents who turned out to be flashes in the pan. The whole thing will be fascinating, but it'll be the fascination of archeology.

[Although I still believe that the Thrust Awards was a noble effort, I have indeed decided to forego this year's awards. Maybe I will rethink them and bring them back later in a different form. Or maybe not.

Nearly all modern western superstition is indeed now based on pseudoscience, or uses pseudoscientific trappings, as a replacement for the religious and cultural myths of our ancestors. But this change has utterly nothing to do with SF or any other literature. It stems from the fact that we live in a culture where the results of science and technology are omnipresent, while most of the populace as a whole are totally scientifically illiterate. To a large number, science is a mysterious, and obviously powerful magic. With the notable exception of L. Ron Hubbard and Dianetics, SF has been a force against pseudoscience, not for it. - DDF]



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I have to question John J. Pierce's comment that Gor books sell well in Moslem countries, for two reasons: 1) the literacy rate in those countries is extremely low; and 2) humans tend to want to read about their fantasies rather than their realities, and the S&M of the Gor books pales before the every day reality in those countries such as Malaysia where women are forced to have their clitoris removed when they have their first period, and are generally given no choice of their sex partners. Gor is mild compared to Middle Eastern realities.

Harry Warner, Jr.  
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Ted White is undoubtedly right when he writes about children's instinctive preference for fantasy. But I was an exception to this rule. I was bored as a child by anything in print or on the movie screen or radio that wasn't very similar to my own environment. Once an aunt in California sent me a book about children growing up in the Far West, and I never finished reading it because the local was too exotic. Then when I was nine or ten, something happened in my psyche, and I suddenly began to love science fiction and fantasy, and read little other fiction for several decades. Curiouser yet, as I approached senility, I began to revert to my old fondness for the mundane and the familiar in fiction. I make a conscious effort about once every six months to recapture my long fondness for fantasy and science fiction, but after reading eight or ten books of that type, I switch back to mystery fiction, fiction set in this general part of the nation, and the like.

It is consoling to find I am still a man of the people rather than one of the brilliant, but lonely intellectual class. The evidence for this

is that I still can't see anything wrong with the answer given in OMNI to the two-liter coke bottle problem. It's been some years since I did darkroom work, but for a couple of decades I processed a lot of black and white film and made scads of enlargements, and always used plastic containers to store the developer. Developer oxidizes gradually, once the chemicals are in water, so unused developer was kept in these plastic containers which were squeezed smaller and smaller to make sure that only a minimum amount of air was inside and prolong the life of the developer. It seemed to work, and I also used a developing tank for a while that used a similar principle in the form of a floating lid.

I was pleased to see the letter from John J. Pierce about the excesses of feminist propagandists. And I share your viewpoint on the Hornig article. I can't imagine myself doing the things Charles has done, but I think it is proper to respect the opinions and behavior of anyone as non-harmful as he has been.

[Your experience with oxidizable photo-developer is actually the opposite situation of the coke problem. For those of you who don't remember, the problem presented in OMNI was having a soft drink go flat in a large plastic container, and the solution given was to squeeze the plastic container so there is little air in the bottle for the coke to decarbonate into. Coke (or soda water, or any carbonated drink) is basically carbon dioxide gas dissolved in water. In a closed bottle, the carbon dioxide in a carbonated beverage establishes an equilibrium between being dissolved in the liquid phase or existing as a gas. As long as there is any appreciable amount of gas dissolved in the liquid, there will be a greater-than-atmospheric pressure in the container. When you open the container, the pressure is released, and some gas escapes. When you close it, the equilibrium is slowly re-established, with gas leaving the liquid and becoming a

gas, building up pressure again. Therefore, squeezing the air out of the container actually would make the beverage de-gas more, and when you come back later, the bottle will be uncollapsed and filled with non-carbonated beverage and carbon dioxide gas.

Your example with the developer was a situation where you wanted to avoid having any gas, oxygen in this case, being dissolved in your liquid developing solution. A collapsed bottle in that case not only avoided having very much oxygen gas in contact with the liquid, but established a less-than-atmospheric pressure within the bottle to help draw whatever dissolved oxygen there is in the liquid out again.

All clear? I feel like Mr. Wizard! But don't worry, Harry, I still consider you to be one of us elite . . . - DDF]

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In reading Arthur Hlavaty's letter in #21 regarding my piece on the Florida Conference on the Fantastic [in issue #20], I have decided that I could pass on all of his comments save one: he states that my experience at the conference was "an unpleasant one". This is not the case. I hoped that my article conveyed a tone of bemusement and ironic observations, rather than one of "unpleasantness." On the contrary, I enjoyed myself very much, in the midst of all my wry observations. I enjoyed myself so much, in fact, that I returned for the 1983 and 1984 Conferences as well. Robert Collins has run a classy show there; the fact that so many of the academics gathered there had never read even Asimov or Clarke merely makes the corner of my mouth smile in a funny way. The rest of me is having a great time, and would go back again.

[We also heard from: Robert Bloch, Chet Twarog, James A. Lee and Daniel Farr.]

to fall rather neatly into three categories. There are four of the most notable short SF works of 1984, by some of the best of the 1980's generation of new SF authors, Kim Stanley Robinson's "The Lucky Strike" could very well be the best SF novella of the year. Pat Murphy's "Art in the War Zone" is also excellent, if a bit didactic, as are Carter Scholz's "The Menagerie of Babel," and Lucius Shepard's strangely powerful "Black Coral." There are also three good stories by new and relatively unknown writers Sharon Farber, Joel Richards and Molly Gloss. The final three stories in *Universe 14* are, sadly, very minor short stories by talented veteran authors, Robert Silverberg, Damon Knight and Gregory Benford. But the truly good work dominates, and this is one of the better volumes in the series.

- Doug Fratz

## Reviews cont. from pg. 32

**PALIMPSESTS** by Carter Scholz and Glenn Harcourt (Ace, 1984, 258 pp., \$2.95). This is the first of Terry Carr's new Ace Specials that I can't recommend without reservations. There are some fascinating aspects of this book, but like its title, the book has a strong penchant for obscurity and enigma. It could have been a wonderful meld of anthropological SF and high-tech physics SF, but it just doesn't quite clearly end up as much of anything as a whole.

**UNIVERSE 14**, edited by Terry Carr (Doubleday, 1984, 182 pp., \$11.95). The ten stories in the latest *Universe* seem

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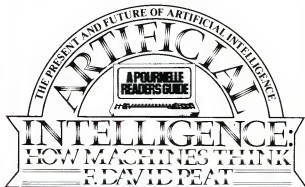
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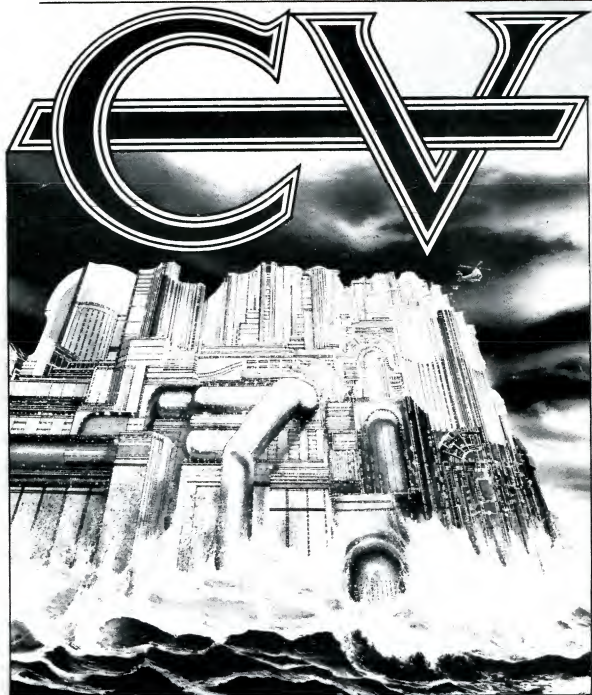
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